

Mahabharata - 41

THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA

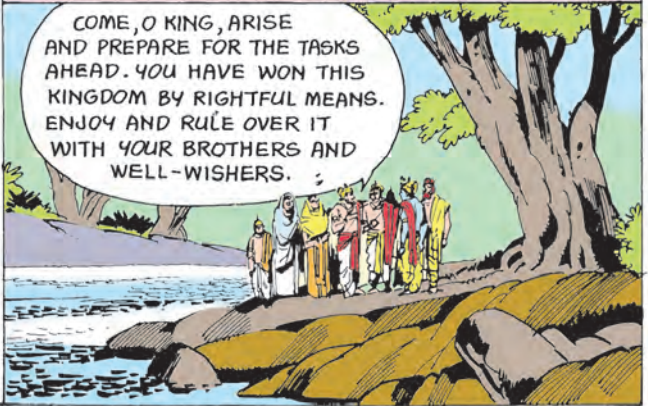
AFTER CONSECRATING THE GRANDSIRE BHEESHMA'S BODY TO THE FIRE WITH DUE CEREMONY, DHRITARASHTRA AND YUDHISHTHIRA PROCEEDED TO THE BANKS OF THE HOLY GANGA. WHILE OFFERING OBOLATIONS, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS ONCE AGAIN FILLED WITH REMORSE.

"SHATTERED BY GRIEF AND HIS EYES MOIST, HE STAGGERED OUT OF THE WATER WHILE BHEEMA STEADIED HIM.



"SEEING HIM SO DESPONDENT, THE OTHER PANDAVA BROTHERS TOO FELT HELPLESS AND FORLORN. ADDRESSING YUDHISHTHIRA, DHRITARASHTRA SAID —

COME, O KING, ARISE AND PREPARE FOR THE TASKS AHEAD. YOU HAVE WON THIS KINGDOM BY RIGHTFUL MEANS. ENJOY AND RULE OVER IT WITH YOUR BROTHERS AND WELL-WISHERS.

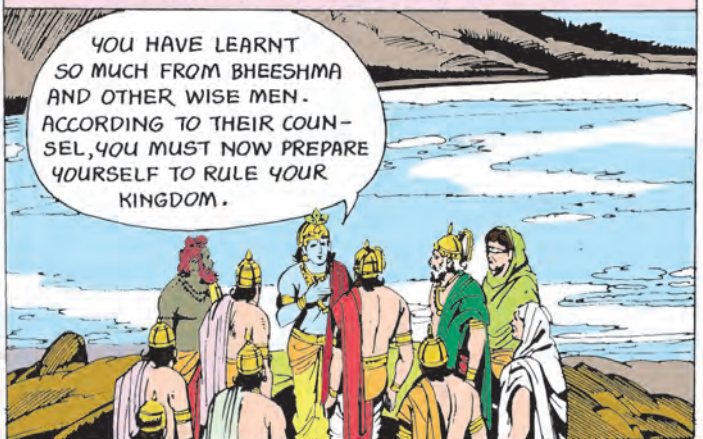


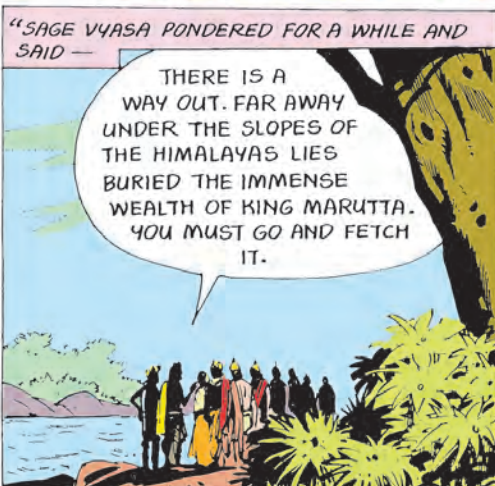
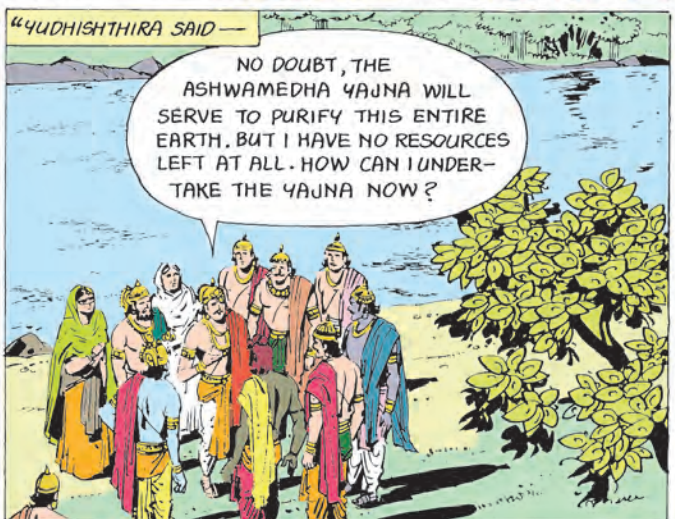
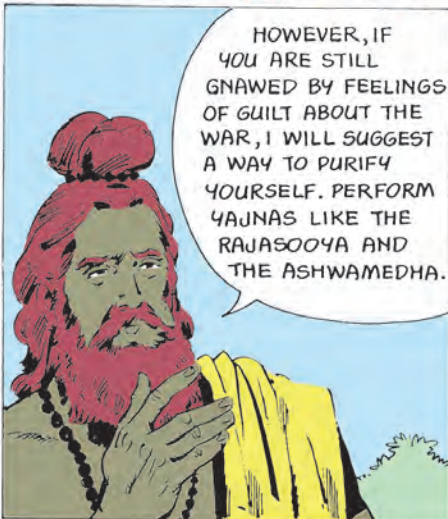
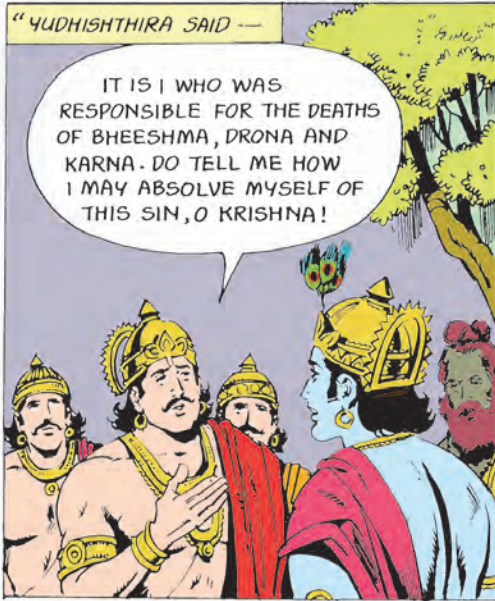
LOOK AT GANDHARI AND ME. WE HAVE LOST ALL OUR HUNDRED SONS. SURELY WE HAVE REASON TO BE SAD. I SEE NO CAUSE FOR YOUR GRIEF.

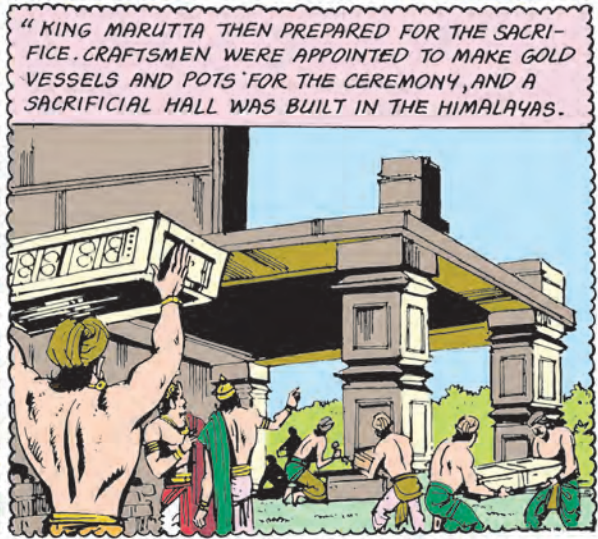
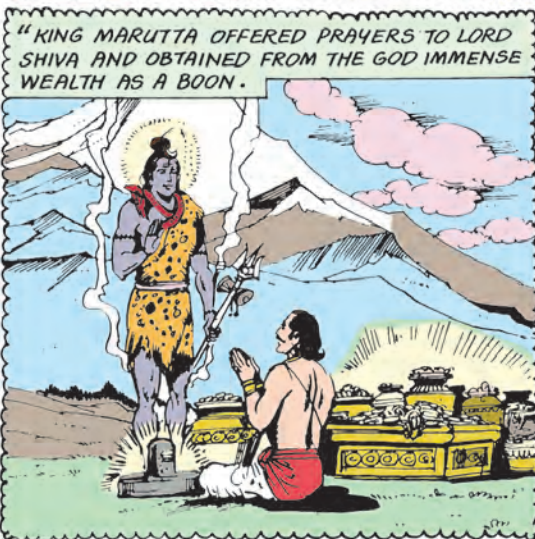
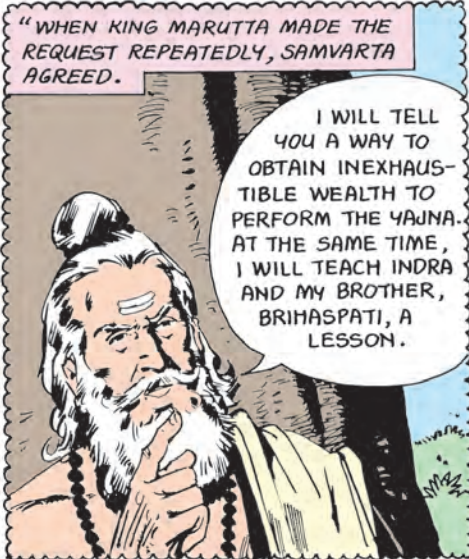
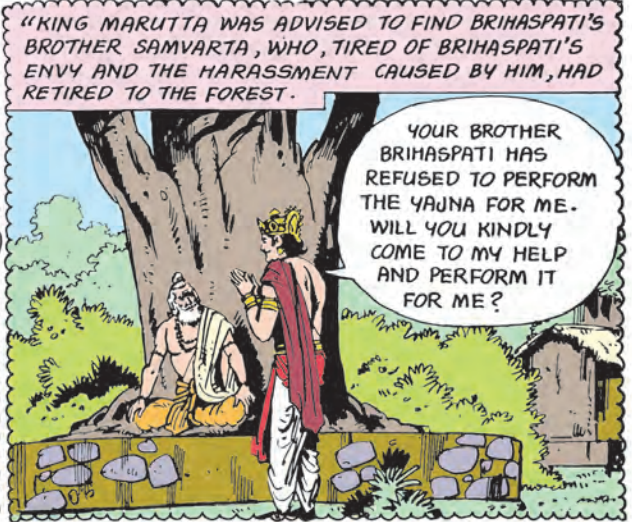
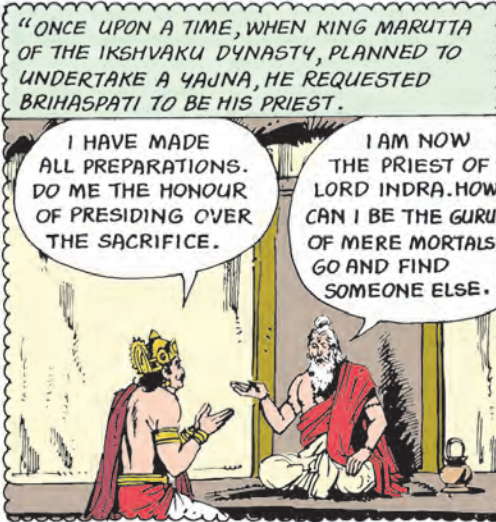


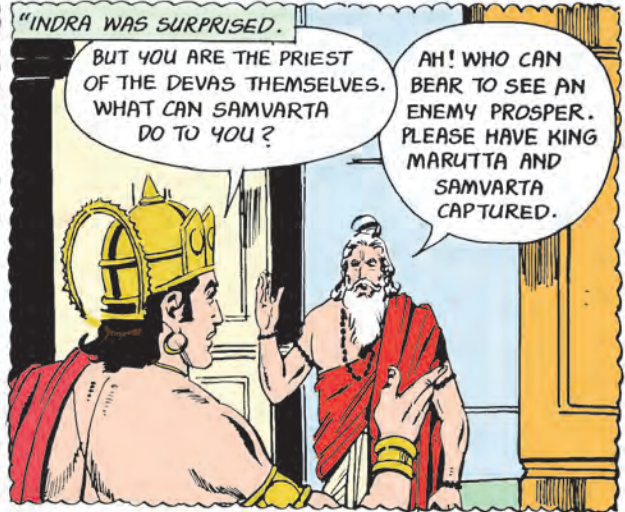
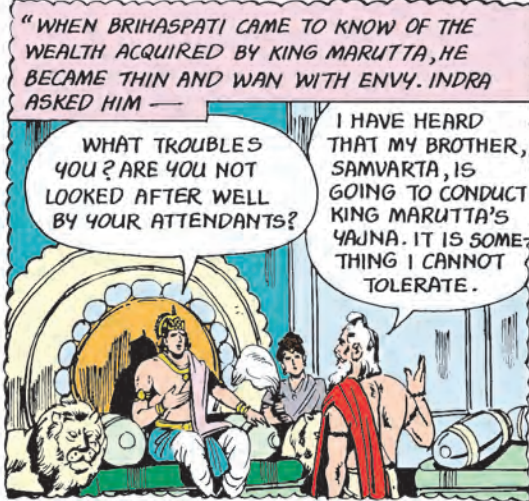
"WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA DID NOT REPLY, KRISHNA SAID —

YOU HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH FROM BHEESHMA AND OTHER WISE MEN. ACCORDING TO THEIR COUNSEL, YOU MUST NOW PREPARE YOURSELF TO RULE YOUR KINGDOM.





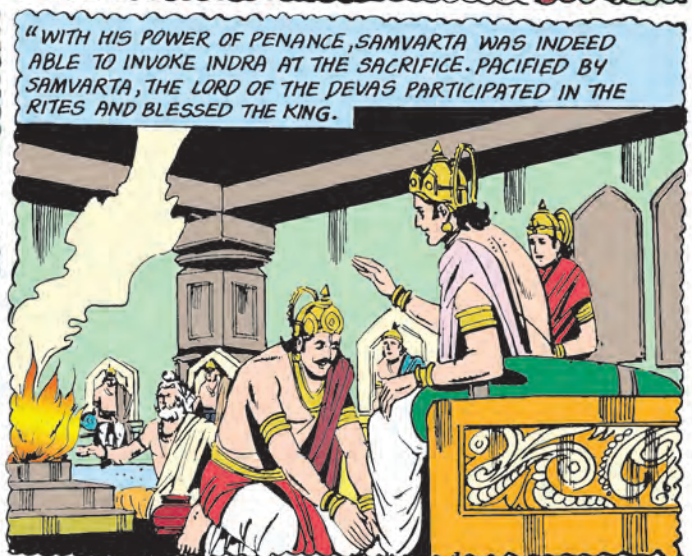
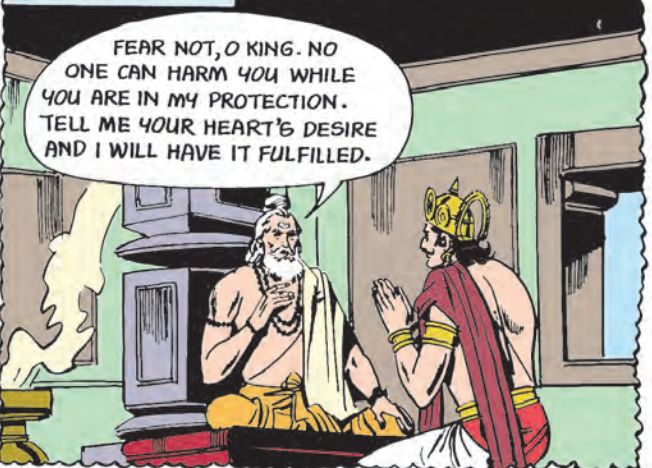




"INDRA THEN SENT MESSENGERS TO KING MARUTTA, OFFERING THE SERVICES OF BRIHASPATI AS THE PRESIDING PRIEST. BUT THE KING WOULD NOT CHANGE HIS MIND.



"ENRAGED, INDRA DECIDED TO USE HIS CELESTIAL WEAPON ON MARUTTA. THE KING BEGGED SAMVARTA TO PROTECT HIM.



AFTER THE SACRIFICE WAS OVER, KING MARUTTA MADE GENEROUS GIFTS OF GOLD TO ALL THE BRAHMANAS. SO GREAT WAS HIS WEALTH THAT THERE STILL REMAINED ENOUGH TO FILL A BIG STOREHOUSE. LEAVING IT BURIED IN THE HIMALAYAS, KING MARUTTA RETURNED TO HIS CAPITAL. YOU MUST NOW ARRANGE TO FETCH THIS TREASURE FOR YOUR YAJNA.



"YUDHISHTHIRA'S GLOOM WAS DISPELLED BY THIS STORY AND HIS CHEER WAS RESTORED. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIS RECEPTIVE MOOD, KRISHNA SAID —

ONE WAR IS NOW OVER. WHAT REMAINS IS YOUR FIGHT WITH YOUR OWN SELF AND CONQUEST OF YOUR OWN MIND. ONCE YOU DO THAT, YOU WILL BE AT PEACE.



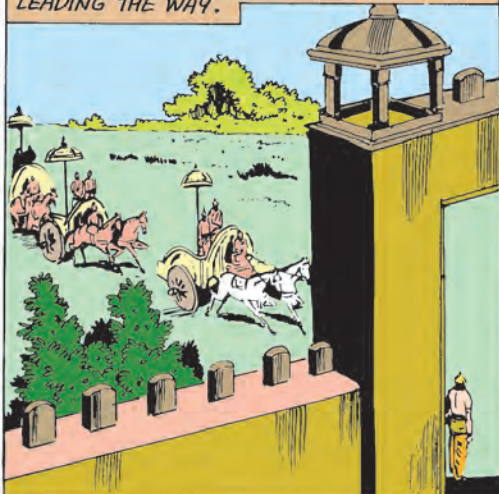
YOU MUST NOW PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF SACRIFICES LIKE THE ASHWAMEDHA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

I AM NOW AT PEACE WITH MYSELF. I WILL CERTAINLY DO AS YOU BID. SOON WE WILL GO TO THE HIMALAYAS.



"YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS RETINUE RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA WITH DHRITARASHTRA LEADING THE WAY.



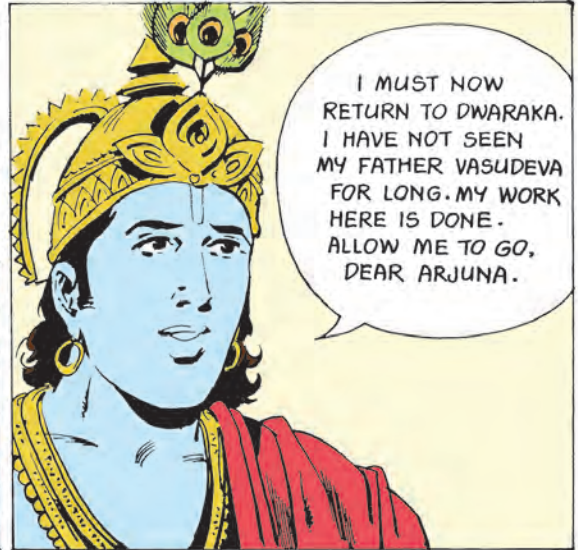
"PEACE AND PROSPERITY PREVAILED DURING KING YUDHISHTHIRA'S RULE. THE WELL-BEING OF THE PEOPLE WAS ASSURED, THERE WAS PLENTY EVERYWHERE AND THE CATTLE WERE CONTENTED.



"ARJUNA AND KRISHNA REVELLED IN THE PEACEFUL SURROUNDINGS. TOGETHER THEY ROAMED THROUGH GARDEN AND GLADE, MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS, REGALING EACH OTHER WITH TALES OF OLD. AFTER SPENDING MANY HAPPY DAYS IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY, KRISHNA SAID —



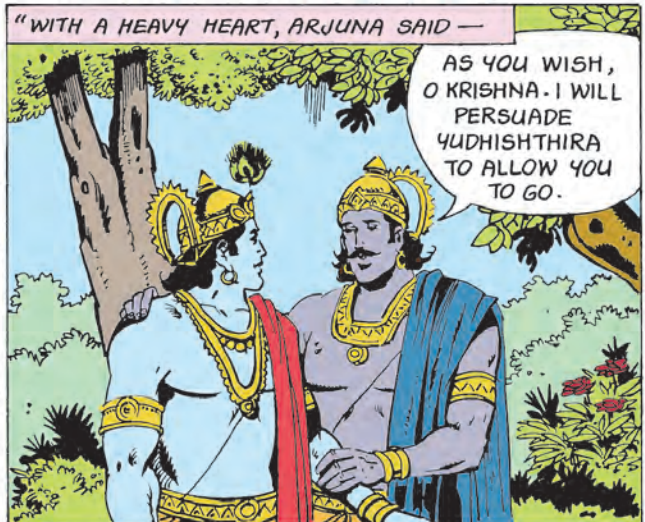
HOW HAPPY AND TRANQUIL THESE PAST FEW DAYS WERE. BUT NOW I MUST TAKE YOUR LEAVE.



I MUST NOW RETURN TO DWARAKA. I HAVE NOT SEEN MY FATHER VASUDEVA FOR LONG. MY WORK HERE IS DONE. ALLOW ME TO GO, DEAR ARJUNA.



WILL YOU ALSO REQUEST YUDHISHTHIRA TO PERMIT ME TO LEAVE? I DARE NOT DO SO LEST I HURT HIS FEELINGS.

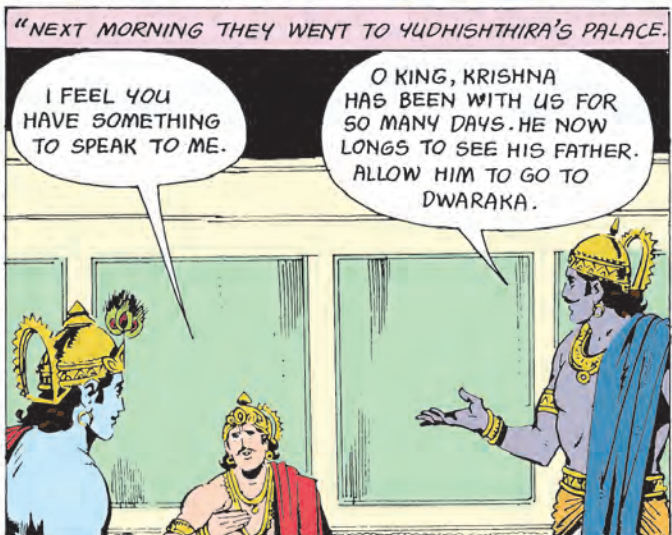


"WITH A HEAVY HEART, ARJUNA SAID —

AS YOU WISH, O KRISHNA. I WILL PERSUADE YUDHISHTHIRA TO ALLOW YOU TO GO.



"THE TWO FRIENDS THEN RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA AND TO THE PRESENCE OF DHRTIRASHTRA.



"NEXT MORNING THEY WENT TO YUDHISHTHIRA'S PALACE.

I FEEL YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SPEAK TO ME.

O KING, KRISHNA HAS BEEN WITH US FOR SO MANY DAYS. HE NOW LONGS TO SEE HIS FATHER. ALLOW HIM TO GO TO DWARAKA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

INDEED HE
MUST GO AND SEE
HIS FATHER. YOU
MAY LEAVE FOR
DWARAKA TODAY,
KRISHNA, IF YOU
WISH. BUT DO NOT
FORGET US WHEN
YOU ARE THERE.
YOU MUST ALSO
RETURN HERE FOR
THE ASHWAMEDHA
YAJNA.



"AFTER BIDDING KUNTI, VIDURA AND OTHERS FAREWELL
KRISHNA AND SUBHADRA LEFT HASTINAPURA.



"MEANWHILE ABHIMANYU'S YOUNG WIFE
WAS STILL GRIEVING OVER HER HUSBAND'S
DEATH. DIVINING HER STATE OF MIND, SAGE
VYASA PAID HER A VISIT TO CONSOLE HER.

DO NOT
GRIEVE SO. YOUR
SON IS DESTINED
TO BE A GREAT AND
BRILLIANT KING.



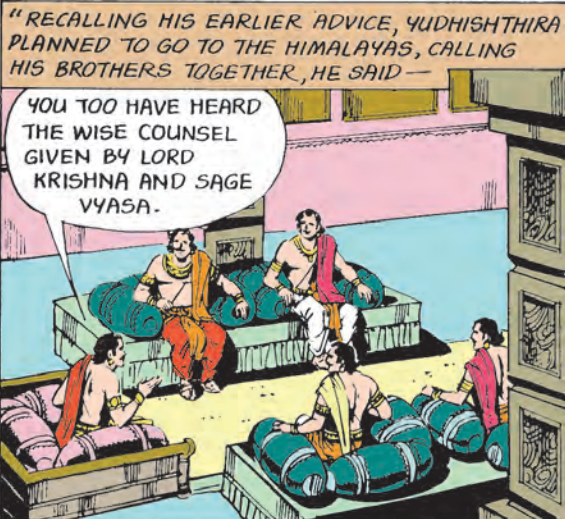
"GOING TO YUDHISHTHIRA, SAGE VYASA SAID —

YOU MAY NOW
PREPARE FOR THE
ASHWAMEDHA
YAJNA.



"RECALLING HIS EARLIER ADVICE, YUDHISHTHIRA
PLANNED TO GO TO THE HIMALAYAS, CALLING
HIS BROTHERS TOGETHER, HE SAID —

YOU TOO HAVE HEARD
THE WISE COUNSEL
GIVEN BY LORD
KRISHNA AND SAGE
VYASA.



OUR RESOURCES
ARE DEPLETED. WE MUST
GO AND FIND THE WEALTH
LEFT BY KING MARUTTA,
ABOUT WHICH SAGE VYASA
TOLD US. WHAT DO YOU
SAY, BHEEMA?

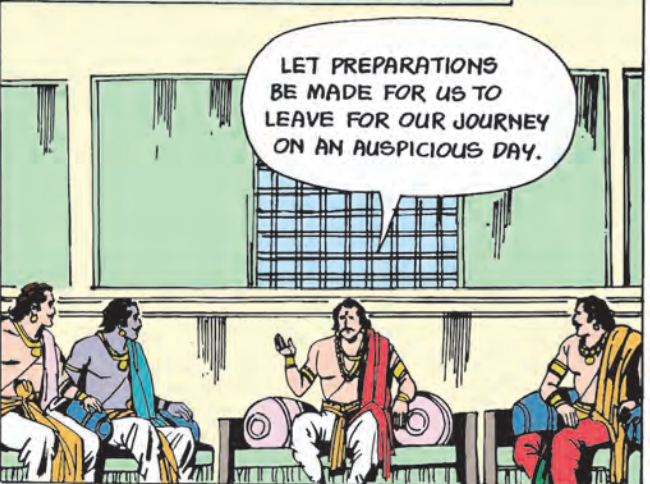


"BHEEMA REPLIED —



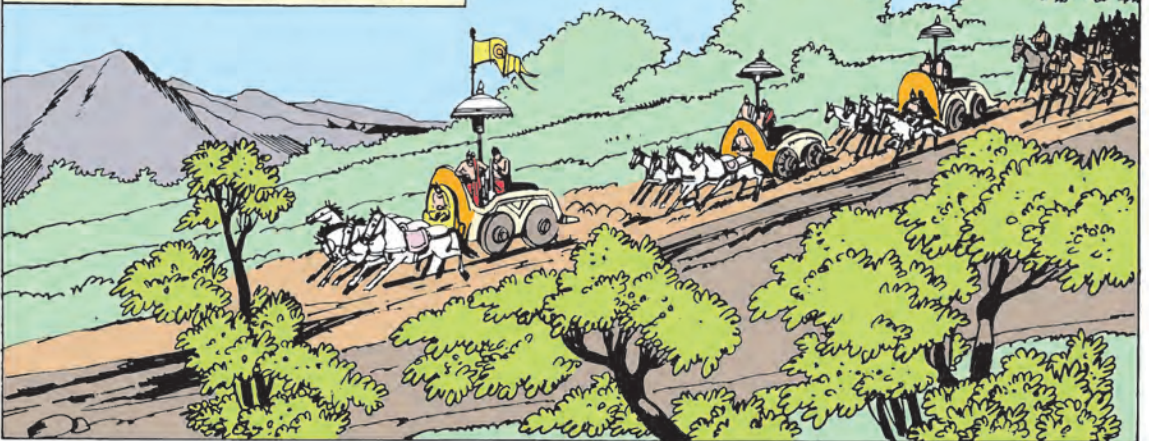
I AM HAPPY TO HEAR THIS. WITH SHIVA'S BLESSINGS, WE WILL FIND THE TREASURE OF KING MARUTTA.

"WHEN ARJUNA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA TOO SUPPORTED YUDHISHTHIRA'S DECISION, HE SAID —



LET PREPARATIONS BE MADE FOR US TO LEAVE FOR OUR JOURNEY ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY.

"LEAVING YUYUTSU TO LOOK AFTER DHRTARASHTRA, GANDHARI AND KUNTI, THE PANDAVAS STARTED ON THEIR JOURNEY TO THE HIMALAYAS.



"CROSSING NUMEROUS RIVERS AND LAKES, FORESTS AND VALLEYS, THE PANDAVAS FINALLY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION.



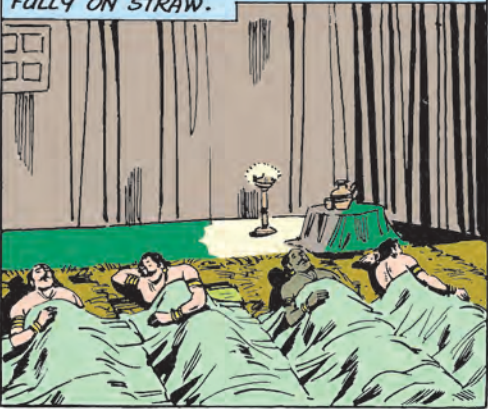
"THEY SET UP CAMP IN A SUITABLE SPOT. YUDHISHTHIRA ASKED THE ROYAL PRIESTS —



WHICH DAY IS SUITABLE TO BEGIN OUR WORK?

TODAY IS A GOOD DAY TO BEGIN ANY IMPORTANT WORK. WE MUST ALL FAST TONIGHT IN PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW'S TASK.

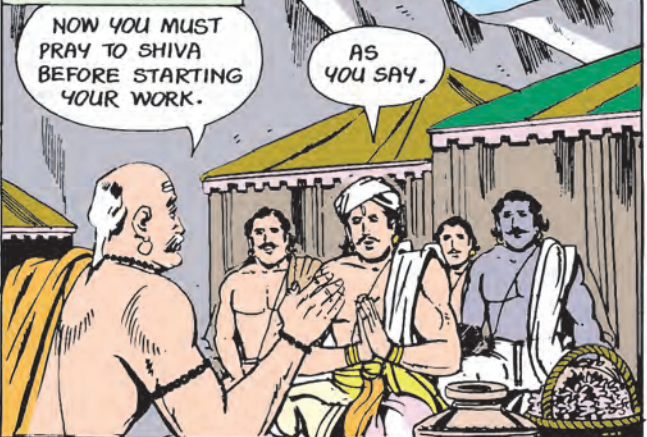
"DELIGHTED AT THE PROSPECT OF STARTING THEIR WORK SOON, THE PANDAVAS FASTED THAT NIGHT AND SLEPT PEACEFULLY ON STRAW."



"NEXT DAY AT DAWN, THE PRIESTS SAID TO YUDHISHTHIRA —"

NOW YOU MUST PRAY TO SHIVA BEFORE STARTING YOUR WORK.

AS YOU SAY.



"WITH APPROPRIATE RITES AND RITUALS, YUDHISHTHIRA OFFERED HIS PRAYER TO SHIVA."



"THEN THEY PROCEEDED TO THE SPOT WHERE THE TREASURE WAS BURIED. UNDER THE PANDAVAS' SUPERVISION, THEIR ARMY BEGAN TO DIG."



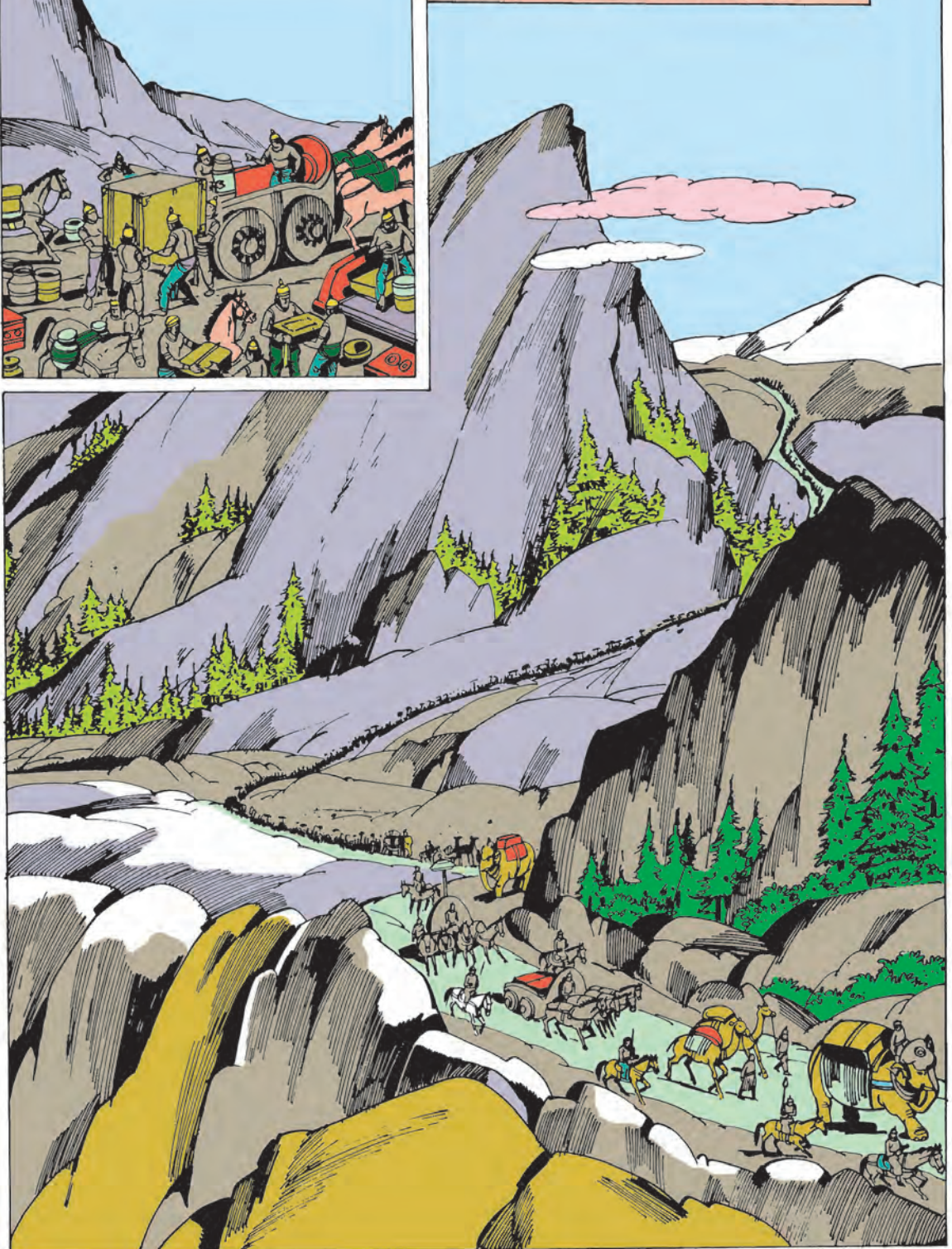
"SOON THEY BROUGHT OUT GLEAMING GOLD VESSELS OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES."



"THESE WERE ARRANGED IN LARGE TRUNKS BROUGHT FOR THAT PURPOSE."



"THOUSANDS OF CAMELS AND HORSES AND HUNDREDS OF CHARIOTS AND ELEPHANTS WERE REQUIRED TO LOAD ALL THE TREASURE THAT WAS CARRIED TO HASTINAPURA."



"MEANWHILE, LORD KRISHNA AND HIS KINSMEN HAD ARRIVED AT HASTINAPURA FOR THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA."



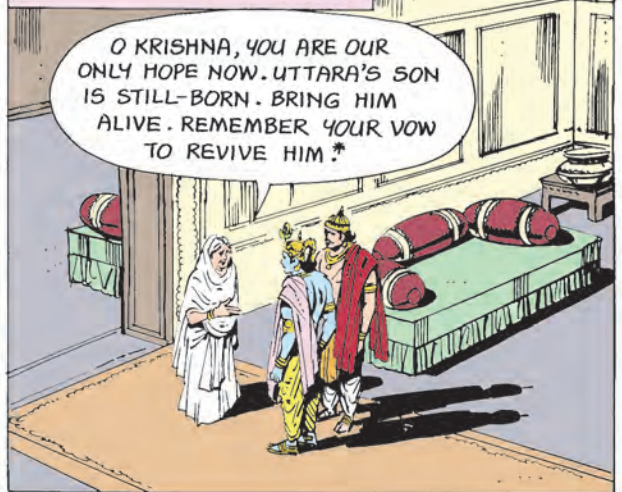
"DHRTIRASHTRA AND VIDURA MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO WELCOME THEM."



"DURING THEIR STAY THERE, ABHIMANYU'S WIFE UTTARA GAVE BIRTH TO A SON. WHEN THE SHOUTS OF JOY FROM THE PALACE SUDDENLY TURNED TO A DISQUIETING SILENCE, KRISHNA RUSHED TO THE INNER CHAMBERS."



"HE SAW KUNTI RUSHING OUT."



"WHEN KRISHNA REACHED THE INNER CHAMBERS, HE SAW SUBHADRA, DRAUPADI AND OTHER WOMEN IN TEARS."



"DRAUPADI RUSHED TO UTTARA AND SAID —



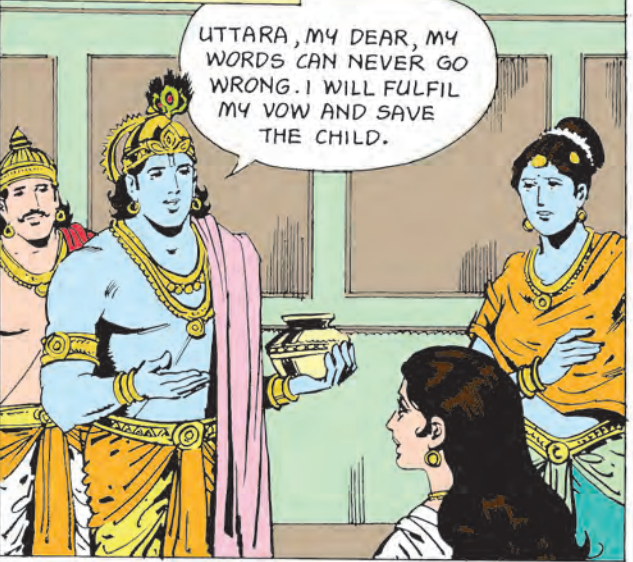
"HER VOICE CHOKING WITH TEARS, UTTARA SAID TO KRISHNA —

I BESEECH YOU, O LORD, REVIVE MY SON. IT SEEMS THAT THE BRAHMASTRA⁺ OF ASHWATTHAMA HAS HAD ITS EVIL EFFECT.



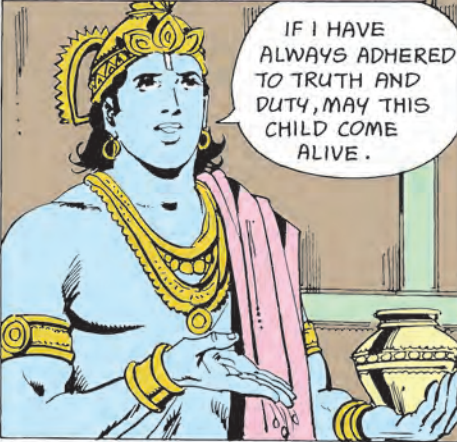
"TAKING SOME WATER IN HIS CUPPED HAND, KRISHNA DECLARED —

UTTARA, MY DEAR, MY WORDS CAN NEVER GO WRONG. I WILL FULFIL MY VOW AND SAVE THE CHILD.



"NULLIFYING THE EVIL INFLUENCE OF THE BRAHMASTRA, HE SAID —

IF I HAVE ALWAYS ADHERED TO TRUTH AND DUTY, MAY THIS CHILD COME ALIVE.



"NO SOONER HAD KRISHNA MADE THIS DECLARATION, THAN THE NEW-BORN INFANT BEGAN TO STIR WITH LIFE.



"JOY AND HAPPINESS PERCOLATED THROUGHOUT THE PALACE.

HAIL KRISHNA, OUR SAVIOUR.

PRAISES BE SHOWERED ON THE LORD.

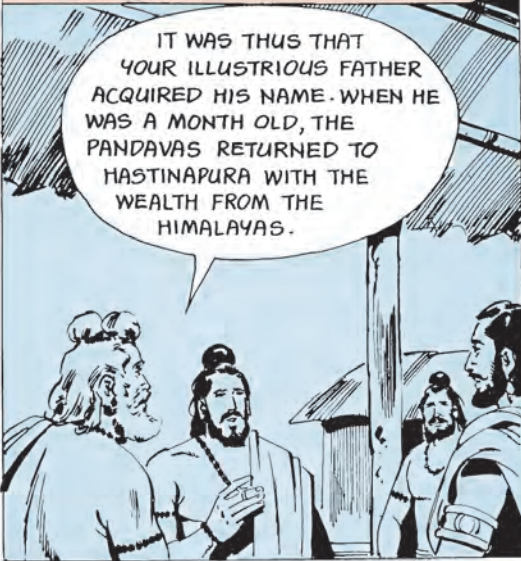


"JOYFULLY, WITH HER SON CRADLED IN HER ARMS, UTTARA BOWED TO KRISHNA WHO SAID —

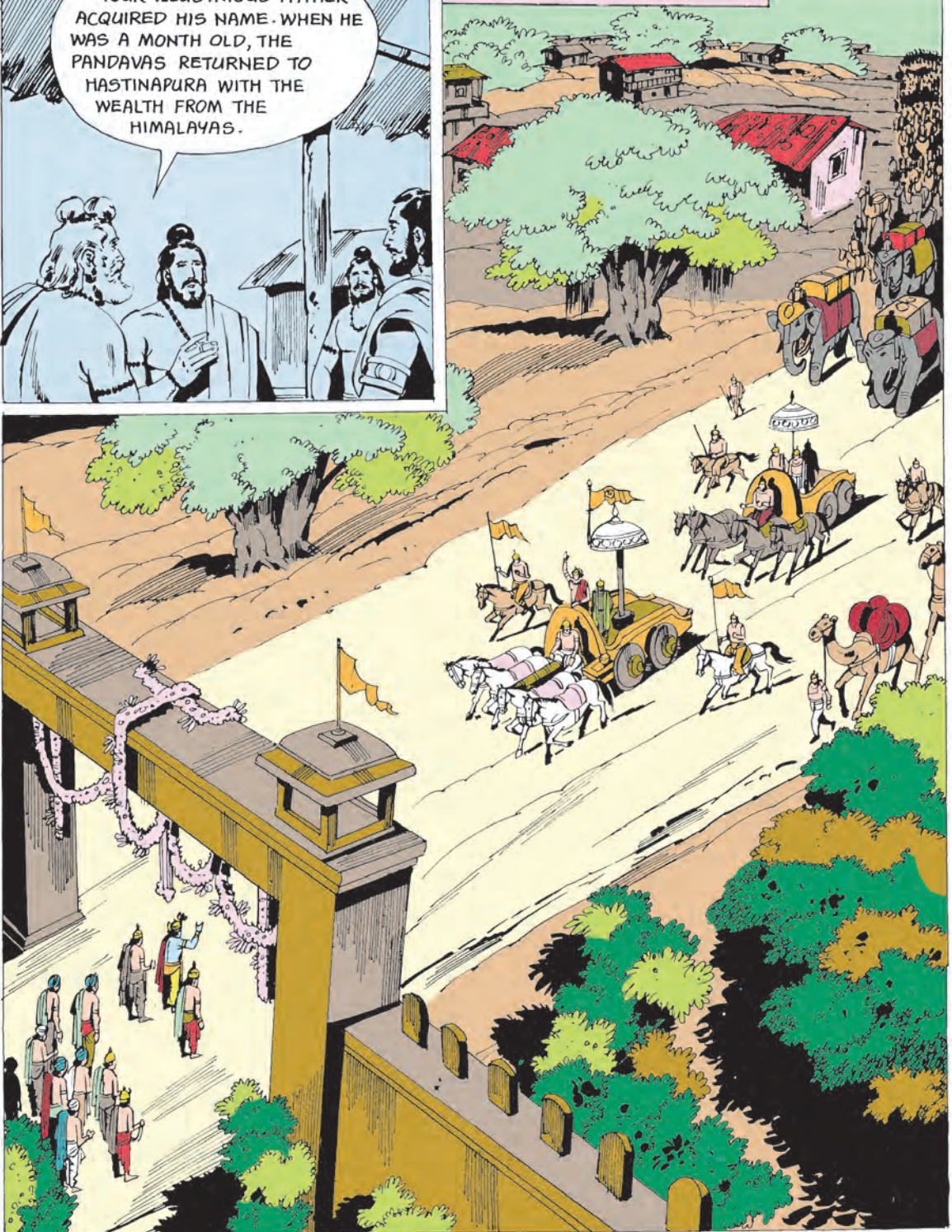
HE IS BORN AFTER THE KURU RACE HAS BEEN DESTROYED. LET HIM BE CALLED PAREEKSHIT.*



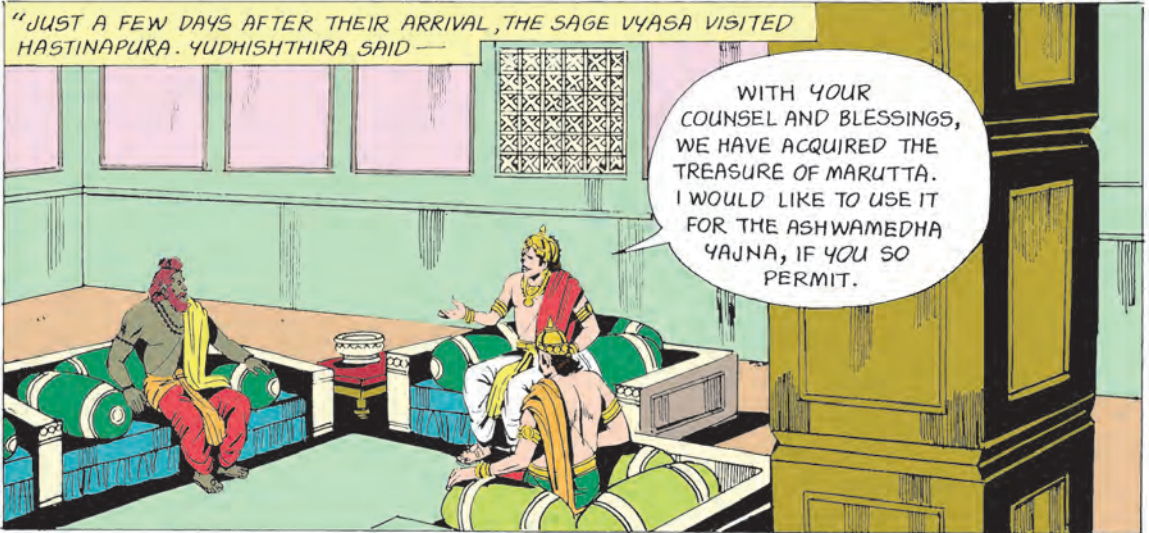
"VAISHAMPAYANA PAUSED AWHILE AS HE NARRATED THE STORY TO JANAMEJAYA."



"KRISHNA RUSHED TO GREET THE PANDAVAS AT THE CITY GATES. THE STREETS WERE GAILY DECORATED WITH FLOWERS AND FESTOONS TO WELCOME THE APPROACHING PANDAVAS WHO WERE BRINGING THE ENORMOUS TREASURE WITH THEM."



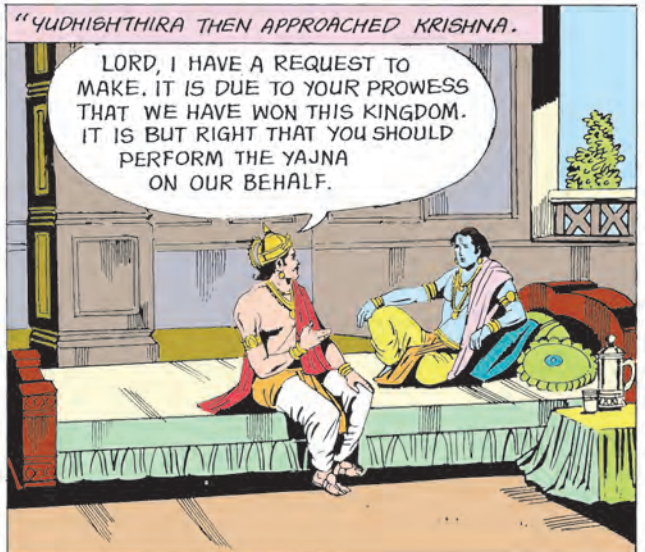
"JUST A FEW DAYS AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL, THE SAGE VYASA VISITED HASTINAPURA. YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —



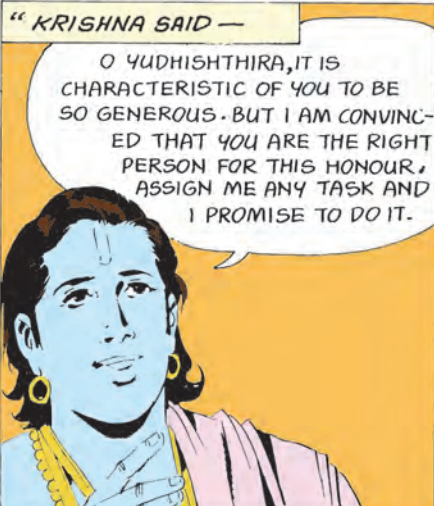
"SAGE VYASA SAID —



"YUDHISHTHIRA THEN APPROACHED KRISHNA.



"KRISHNA SAID —



"SAGE VYASA SELECTED AN APPROPRIATE DAY FOR THE YAJNA. HECTIC PREPARATIONS WERE BEGUN.



"YUDHISHTHIRA DID AS HE HAD BEEN TOLD AND THEN CALLED FOR THE SAGE VYASA .

EVERYTHING IS NOW READY. HERE IS THE HORSE. TELL ME, WHO SHOULD ACCOMPANY IT ?

ARJUNA IS THE ACE ARCHER. HE IS THE RIGHT CHOICE TO FOLLOW THE HORSE.



LET BHEEMA AND NAKULA ATTEND TO THE ROYAL DUTIES WHILE SAHADEVA LOOKS AFTER THE HOUSEHOLD.

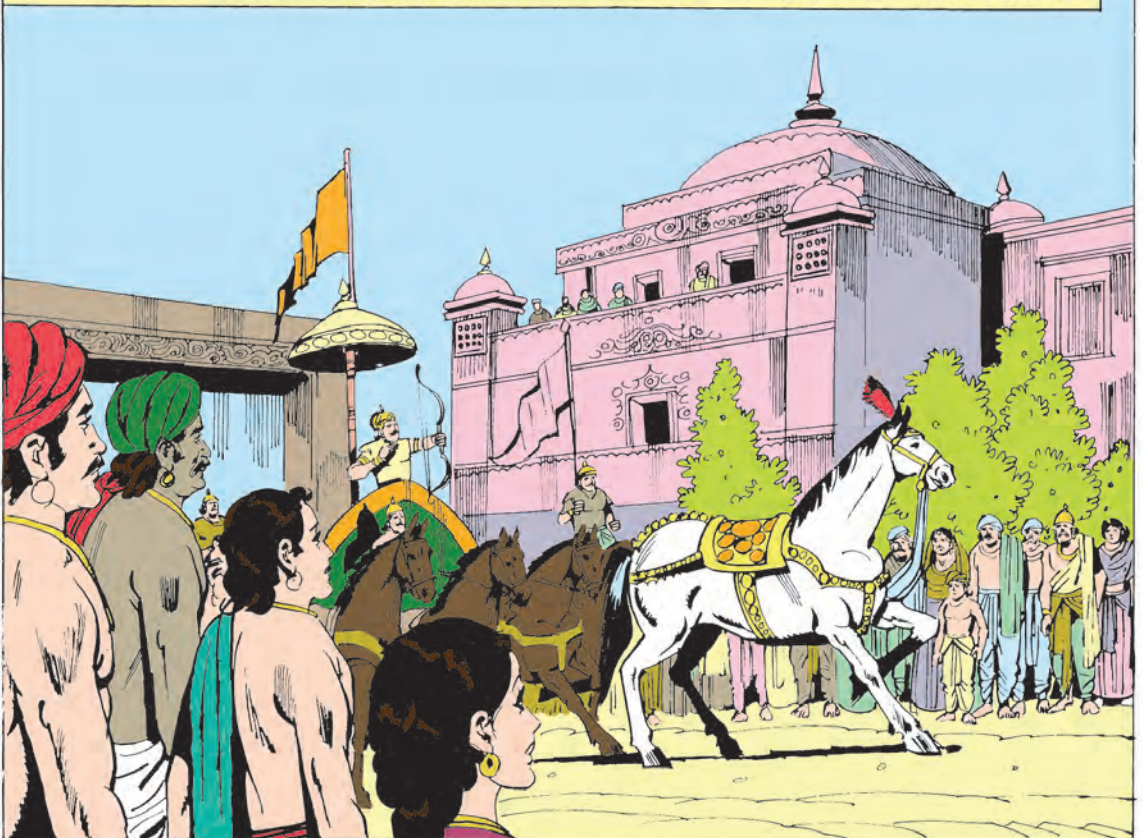


"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID TO ARJUNA —

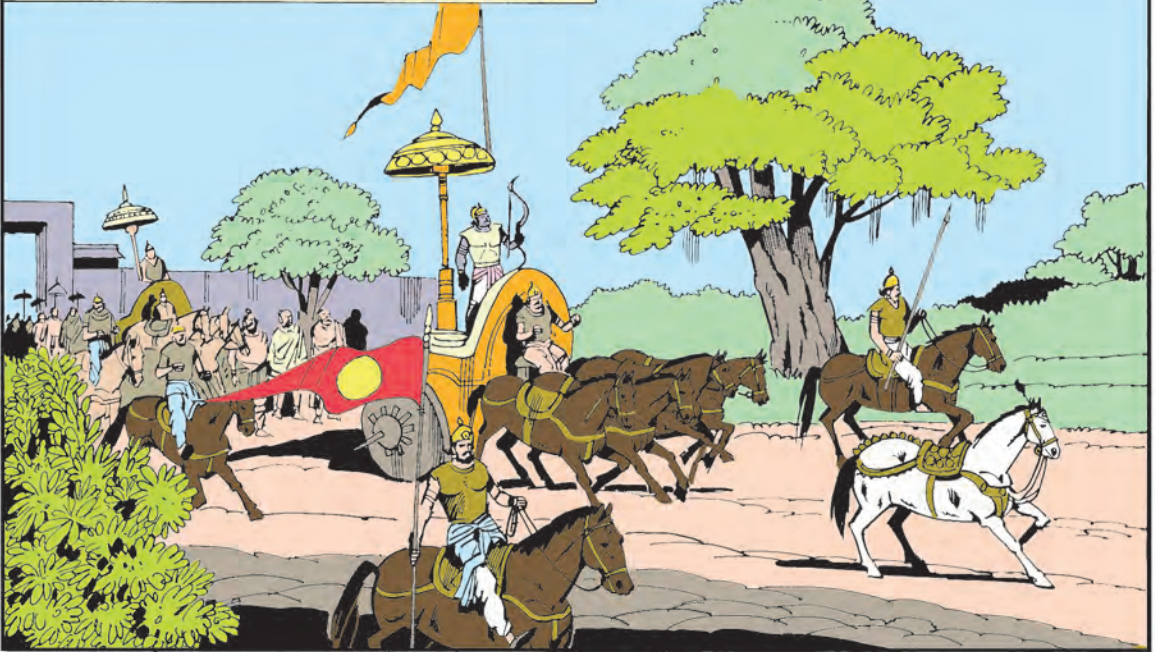
YOU, BRAVE ARJUNA, MUST GO WITH THIS HORSE. INVITE ALL THE KINGS FOR THE YAJNA. SHOULD ANYONE OBSTRUCT THE HORSE, OPPOSE HIM, BUT AVOID BLOODSHED AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.



"SAGE VYASA PERFORMED THE APPROPRIATE RITES AND SENT OFF THE SACRIFICIAL HORSE.



"ARJUNA ACCOMPANIED THE HORSE, HAPPILY TWANGING HIS GANDEEVA, FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL PRIESTS AND SOLDIERS."



"MEANWHILE YUDHISHTHIRA SAT BEFORE THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE, LOOKING RESPLENDENT IN SILK GARMENTS AND GOLD ORNAMENTS, IN PREPARATION FOR THE INITIATION RITES OF THE YAJNA."



"ARJUNA FOLLOWED THE HORSE WHEREVER IT WENT. FIRST TO THE NORTH, THEN TO THE EAST. SEVERAL KINGS SOUGHT TO OBSTRUCT THE HORSE, BUT ARJUNA PROVED MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THEM. ONE BY ONE, THEY CONSENTED TO THE SUZERAINTY OF THE PANDAVAS AND AGREED TO ATTEND THE YAJNA."



"AFTER ACCOMPLISHING HIS TASK, ARJUNA MADE HIS WAY BACK TO HASTINAPURA. WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA HEARD OF THIS, HIS JOY KNEW NO BOUNDS.



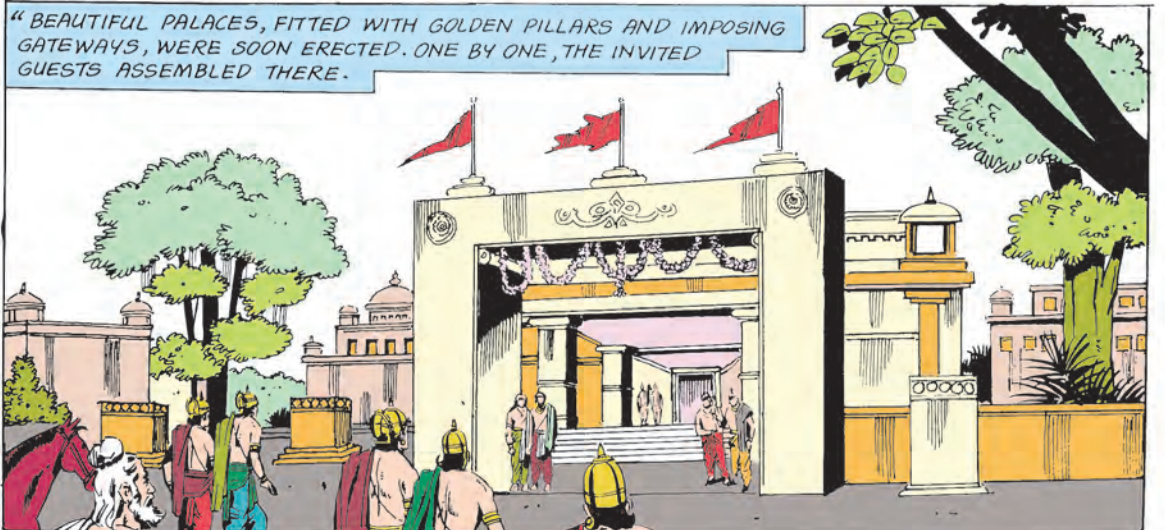
THERE IS BARELY A MONTH LEFT FOR THE PREPARATIONS. BHEEMA, SELECT A SUITABLE PLACE FOR THE SITE.



"ELATED BY THE TIDINGS OF ARJUNA'S RETURN, BHEEMA WENT ABOUT FULFILLING HIS DUTIES WITH ENTHUSIASM.



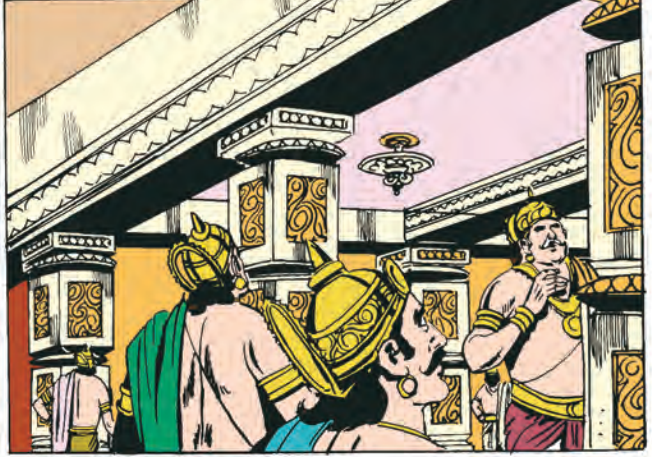
"BEAUTIFUL PALACES, FITTED WITH GOLDEN PILLARS AND IMPOSING GATEWAYS, WERE SOON ERECTED. ONE BY ONE, THE INVITED GUESTS ASSEMBLED THERE.



"BEARING RICH GIFTS FOR YUDHISHTHIRA, KINGS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE LAND CAME FOR THE YAJNA."



"THE RICHLY DECORATED SACRIFICIAL HALL FILLED THEM WITH AWE AND ADMIRATION."



"EXCELLENT ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE TO FEED AND HOUSE THE THOUSANDS OF GUESTS."



"AS YUDHISHTHIRA, WITH THE HUMILITY CHARACTERISTIC OF HIM, PERSONALLY SUPERVISED THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMFORT OF HIS GUESTS, A MESSENGER ARRIVED."



MY MASTER, ARJUNA HAS ARRIVED AT THE CITY GATES.

HERE IS YOUR REWARD FOR BRINGING THIS HAPPY NEWS.

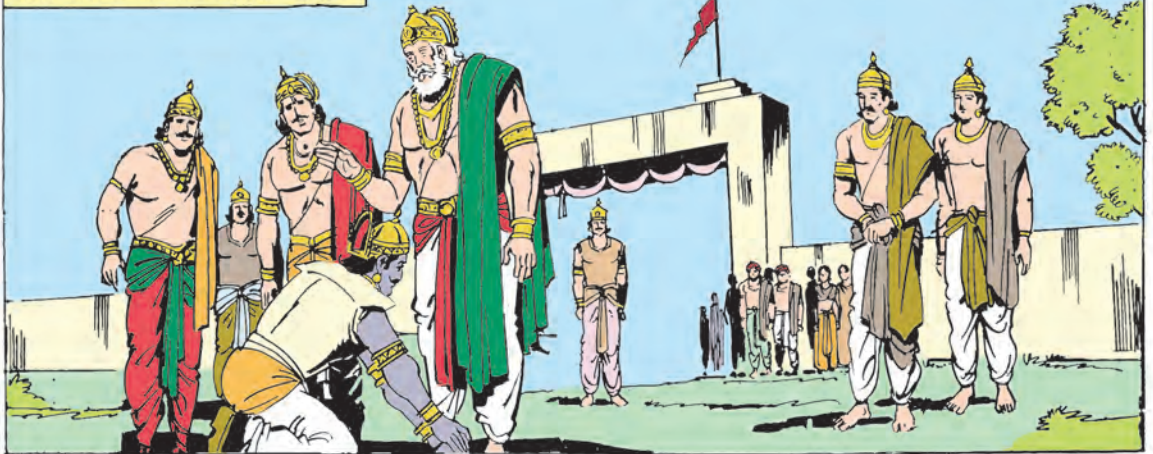
"JUST THEN THE SACRIFICIAL HORSE GALLOPED INTO SIGHT FOLLOWED BY THE WEARY BUT VICTORIOUS ARJUNA."



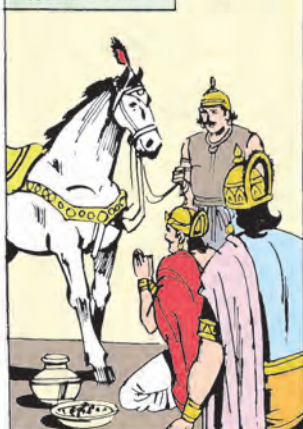
"PEOPLE SHOWERED PRAISES ON HIM AS HE PROCEEDED TOWARDS THE YAJNA-ALTAR."



"DHRTARASHTRA AND YUDHISHTHIRA HASTENED TO WELCOME HIM."



"WITH DUE CEREMONY, THE HORSE WAS SACRIFICED."



"YUDHISHTHIRA THEN OFFERED THE WHOLE EARTH AS A GIFT TO VYASA, WHO SAID—

I RETURN THIS GIFT TO YOU. WE BRAHMANAS PREFER A GIFT OF MONEY, NOT LAND.



"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS INSISTENT—

I CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING FROM BRAHMANAS. MY BROTHERS TOO WILL AGREE.



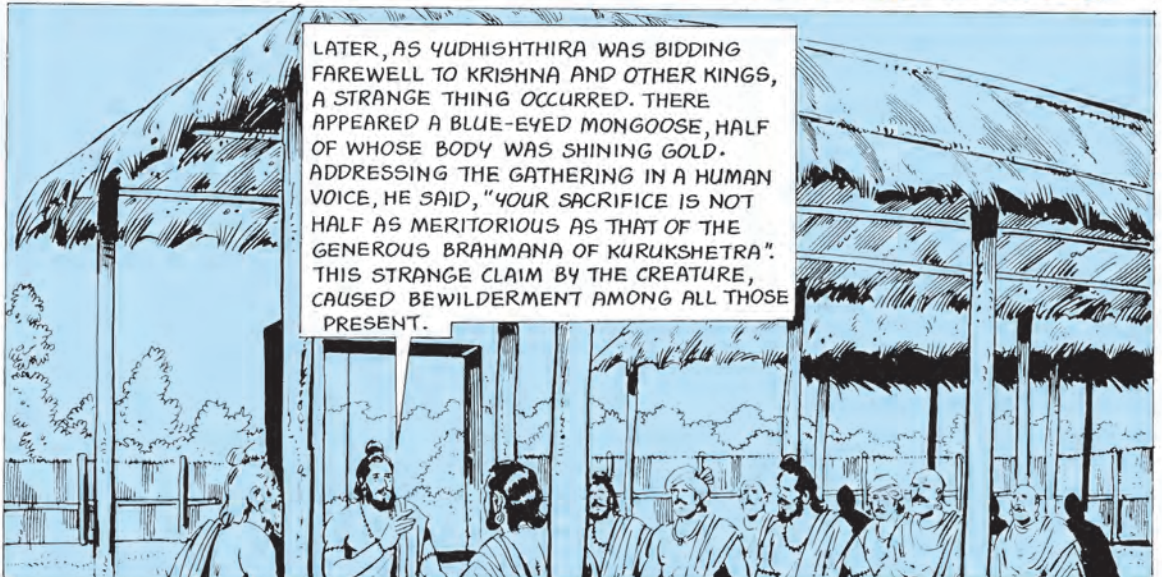
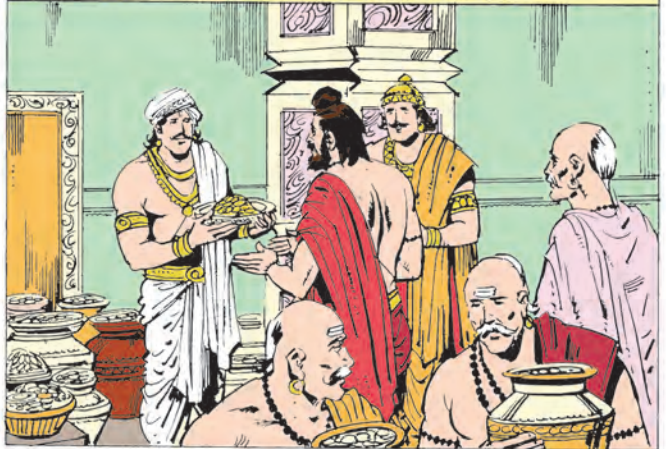
"THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ASHWAMEDHA REQUIRED THE GIFTING AWAY OF ALL THE LAND ACQUIRED DURING THE CONQUEST. BUT SELDOM WAS THIS ACTUALLY DONE. INSTEAD, GENEROUS GIFTS OF GOLD WERE MADE TO THE BRAHMANAS. SO VYASA PERSUADED YUDHISHTHIRA —



"KRISHNA SAID TO YUDHISHTHIRA —



"KING YUDHISHTHIRA GIFTED TO THE ATTENDANT BRAHMANAS MILLIONS OF GOLD COINS AS WELL AS ALL THE GOLD VESSELS USED FOR THE CEREMONY.



LATER, AS YUDHISHTHIRA WAS BIDDING FAREWELL TO KRISHNA AND OTHER KINGS, A STRANGE THING OCCURRED. THERE APPEARED A BLUE-EYED MONGOOSE, HALF OF WHOSE BODY WAS SHINING GOLD. ADDRESSING THE GATHERING IN A HUMAN VOICE, HE SAID, "YOUR SACRIFICE IS NOT HALF AS MERITORIOUS AS THAT OF THE GENEROUS BRAHMANA OF KURUKSHETRA". THIS STRANGE CLAIM BY THE CREATURE, CAUSED BEWILDERMENT AMONG ALL THOSE PRESENT.

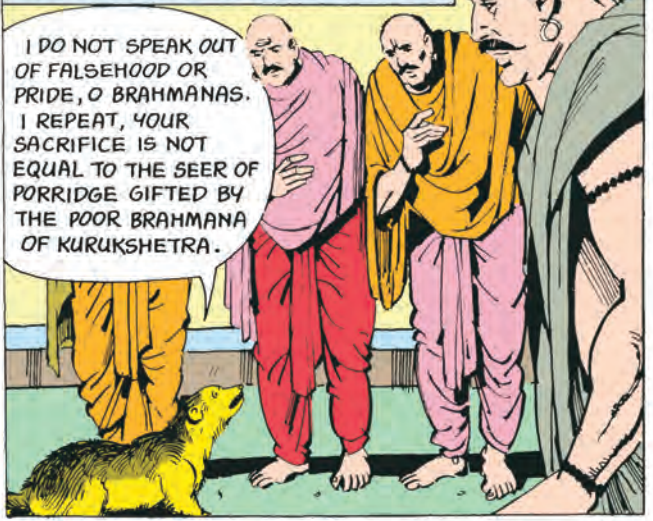
"THE PRIESTS SURROUNDED THE MONGOOSE AND ASKED HIM —

WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM? WHO ARE YOU TO FIND FAULT WITH OUR SACRIFICE? WE HAVE DONE EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO THE SHASTRAS. WHAT MAKES YOU SCORN US?



"THE MONGOOSE LAUGHED AND SAID —

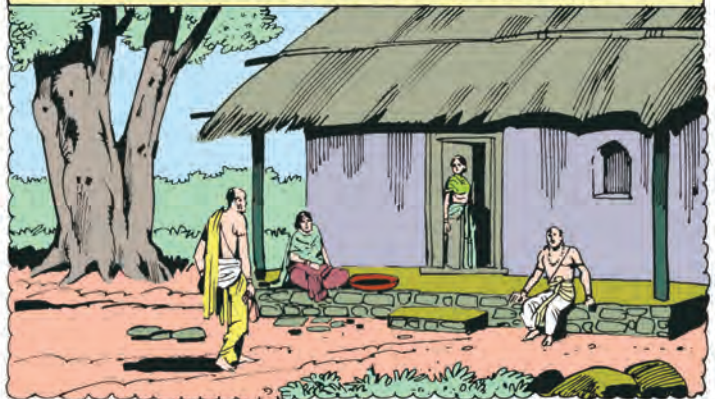
I DO NOT SPEAK OUT OF FALSEHOOD OR PRIDE, O BRAHMANAS. I REPEAT, YOUR SACRIFICE IS NOT EQUAL TO THE SEER OF PORRIDGE GIFTED BY THE POOR BRAHMANA OF KURUKSHETRA.



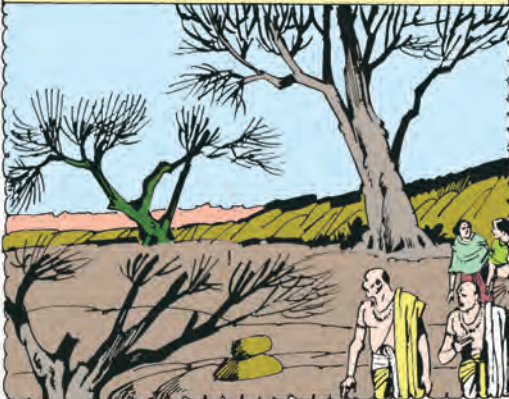
I WITNESSED THIS NOBLE ACT MYSELF AND, AS A RESULT OF HIS MERIT, HALF MY BODY HAS BECOME GOLD. LISTEN TO ME, O BRAHMANAS, WHILE I NARRATE THAT INCIDENT TO YOU.



LONG AGO, IN KURUKSHETRA, THERE LIVED A BRAHMANA WHO OBTAINED FOOD BY GLEANING GRAIN FROM NEARBY FIELDS. HIS FAMILY, CONSISTING OF HIS WIFE, SON AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, ATE ONLY ONCE IN THREE DAYS...



... AND SOMETIMES EVEN LESS FREQUENTLY. ONCE THERE WAS A TERRIBLE DROUGHT. THE LAND WAS PARCHED, THE FIELDS LAY BARE. THE FAMILY STARVED FOR DAYS ON END.



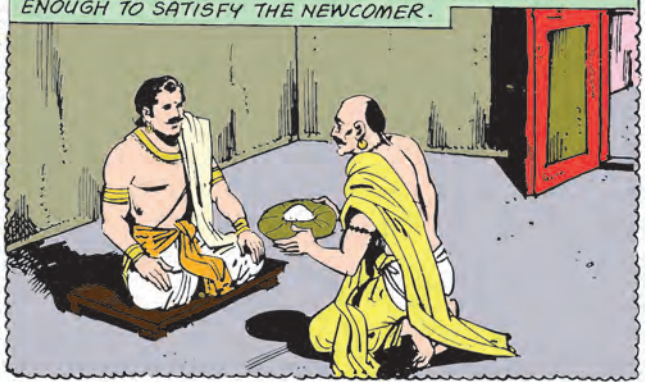
ONE DAY, AFTER WANDERING ABOUT FOR HOURS IN THE HEAT AND DUST, THEY MANAGED TO COLLECT A SEER OF GRAIN.



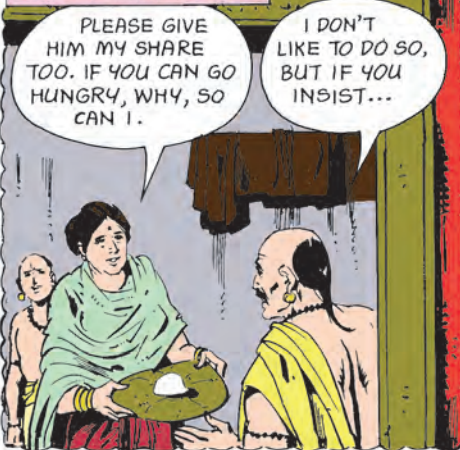
"THEY MADE PORRIDGE OUT OF IT, AND DIVIDED IT INTO FOUR EQUAL PORTIONS. JUST THEN A GUEST ARRIVED."



"THEY WELCOMED THE UNEXPECTED GUEST AND INVITED HIM TO SHARE THEIR MEAL. THE BRAHMANA FIRST OFFERED HIS OWN SHARE. BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE NEWCOMER."



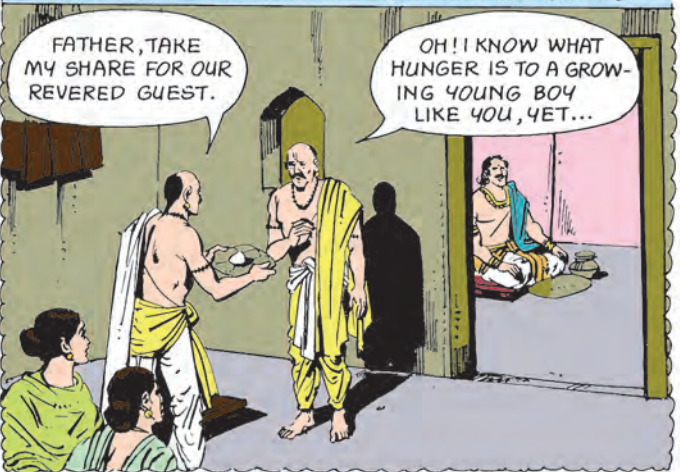
"THE BRAHMANA FELT HELPLESS AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. HIS WIFE CALLED HIM ASIDE."



PLEASE GIVE HIM MY SHARE TOO. IF YOU CAN GO HUNGRY, WHY, SO CAN I.

I DON'T LIKE TO DO SO, BUT IF YOU INSIST...

"RELUCTANTLY, THE HOST GAVE HIS WIFE'S PORTION TO THE GUEST WHO STILL DID NOT LOOK SATIATED. THE SON SAID —



FATHER, TAKE MY SHARE FOR OUR REVERED GUEST.

OH! I KNOW WHAT HUNGER IS TO A GROWING YOUNG BOY LIKE YOU, YET...

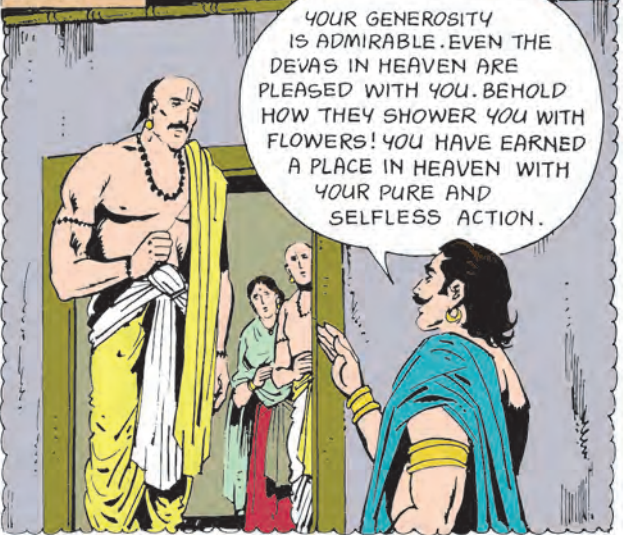
"SAYING SO, THE BRAHMANA OFFERED THE THIRD PORTION TO THE GUEST. BUT STILL HIS HUNGER SEEMED UNAPPEASED. THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW SAID SOFTLY —



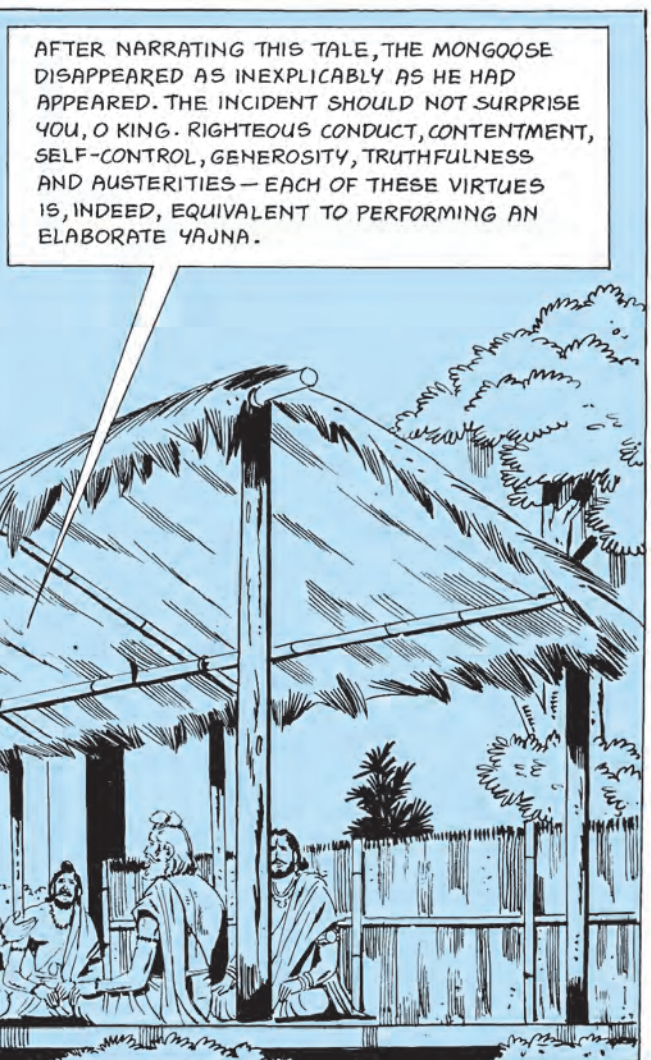
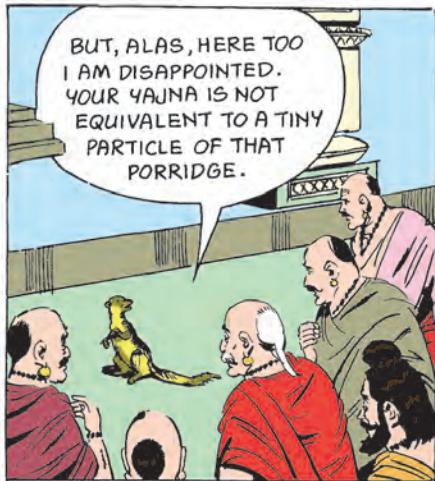
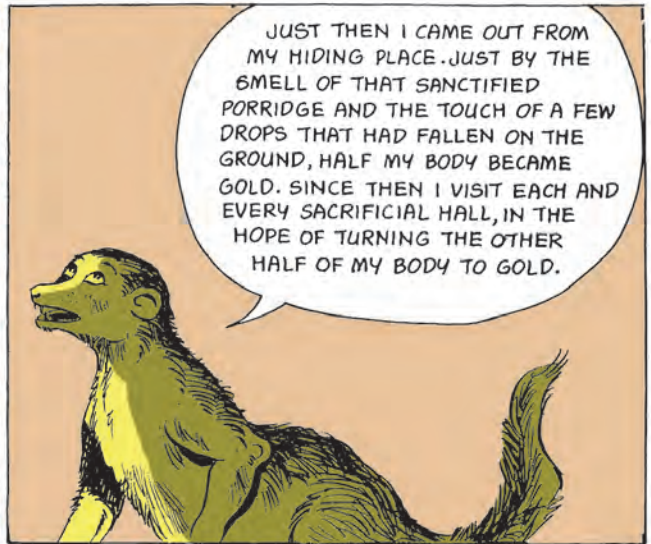
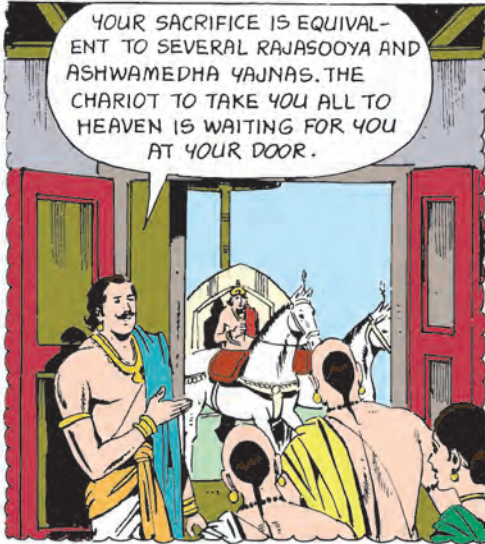
DEAR FATHER, PLEASE ACCEPT MY SHARE TOO.

FROM YOU I CAN NOT. YOU ARE YET A CHILD. MOREOVER YOU ARE HUNGRY, AND FRAIL BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUOUS STARVATION.

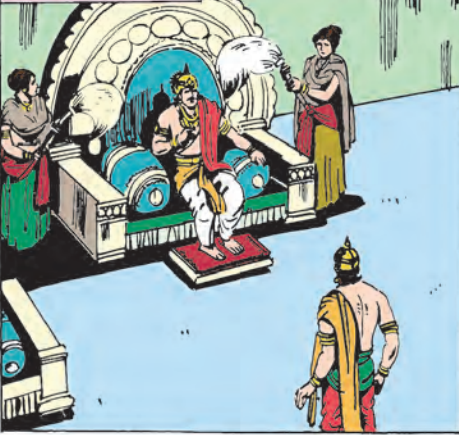
"BUT SHE PERSUADED HIM TO OFFER THE LAST PORTION TOO TO THE GUEST. SATISFIED AT LAST, HE SAID —



YOUR GENEROSITY IS ADMIRABLE. EVEN THE DEVAS IN HEAVEN ARE PLEASED WITH YOU. BEHOLD HOW THEY SHOWER YOU WITH FLOWERS! YOU HAVE EARNED A PLACE IN HEAVEN WITH YOUR PURE AND SELFLESS ACTION.



"AFTER THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA WAS OVER, YUDHISHTHIRA RETURNED TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES.



"BUT EVEN AFTER HE WAS FORMALLY CROWNED HE SOUGHT DHRITARASHTRA'S ADVICE ON EVERY IMPORTANT MATTER.



"KRIPACHARYA AND VIDURA WERE DHRITARASHTRA'S CONSTANT COMPANIONS. SAGE VYASA TOO VISITED HIM REGULARLY AND REGALED HIM WITH STORIES.



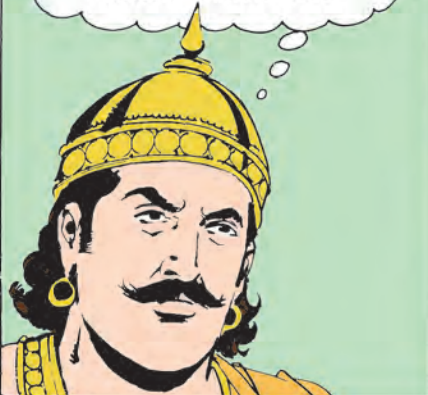
"ONE DAY, YUDHISHTHIRA SAID TO HIS BROTHERS —

WE MUST DO OUR BEST TO MAKE HIM FORGET THE LOSS OF HIS SONS. LET NO EFFORT BE SPARED TO MAKE DHRITARASHTRA AND GANDHARI COMFORTABLE AND CONTENTED.



"ARJUNA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA READILY COMPLIED. BUT NOT BHEEMA.

WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS THE RESULT OF DHRITARASHTRA'S EVIL MIND. I CAN NEVER FORGIVE HIM. NEVER!



"ALTHOUGH IN DEFERENCE TO YUDHISHTHIRA'S WISHES, HE WAS OUTWARDLY POLITE TO THE OLD COUPLE, HIS HEART WAS FILLED WITH BITTERNESS. ONE DAY, WHEN THEY WERE WITHIN HEARING, HE BOASTED TO HIS FRIENDS.

SEE THESE STRONG ARMS OF MINE.

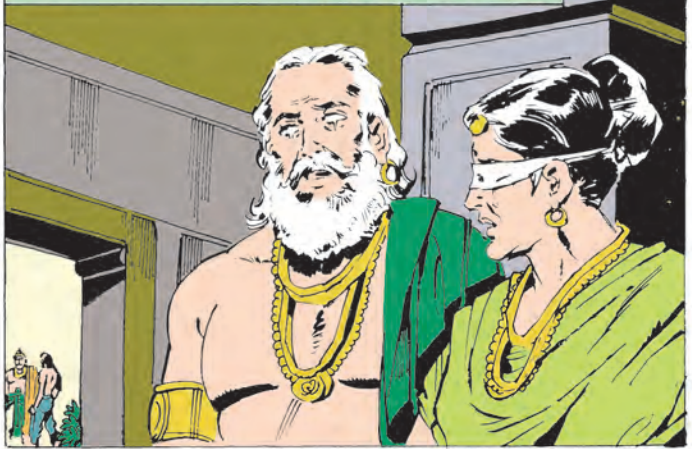


"DISPLAYING HIS STRONG BICEPS, HE SAID —

WITH THESE VERY ARMS I CRUSHED TO DEATH ALL THE SONS OF THAT BLIND KING, DHRITARASHTRA.



"BHEEMA WENT ON TO GIVE A VIVID DESCRIPTION OF HOW HE HAD KILLED THE KAURAVAS, KNOWING VERY WELL HOW MUCH PAIN IT WOULD CAUSE TO THE OLD KING.

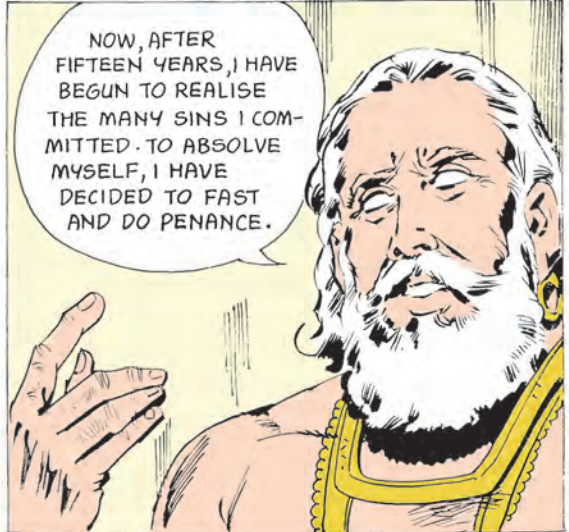


"FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, DHRITARASHTRA AND GANDHARI HAD LIVED AMICABLY WITH THE PANDAVAS, BUT BHEEMA'S CRUEL WORDS OPENED UP OLD WOUNDS. DHRITARASHTRA CALLED HIS FRIENDS TOGETHER.

YOU ALL KNOW WELL ENOUGH HOW THE KAURAVA CLAN WAS DESTROYED BECAUSE I IGNORED THE ADVICE OF MY WELL-WISHERS.

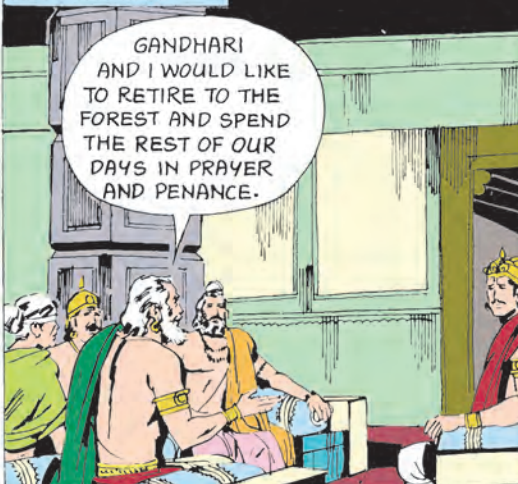


NOW, AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS, I HAVE BEGUN TO REALISE THE MANY SINS I COMMITTED. TO ABSOLVE MYSELF, I HAVE DECIDED TO FAST AND DO PENANCE.

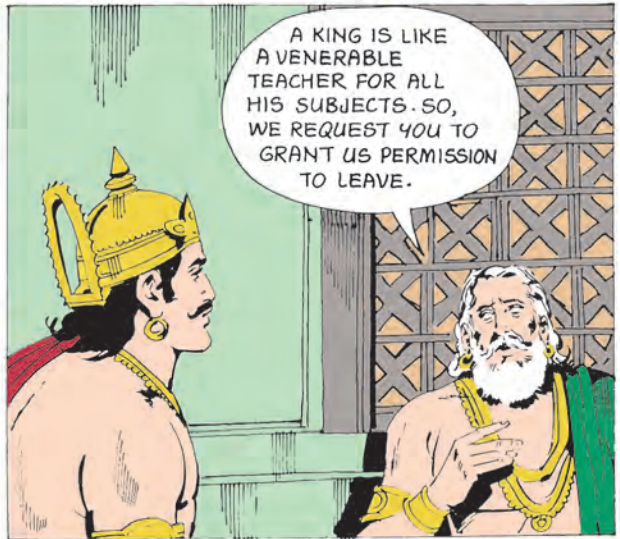


"THEN ONE DAY, DHRITARASHTRA TOLD YUDHISHTHIRA —

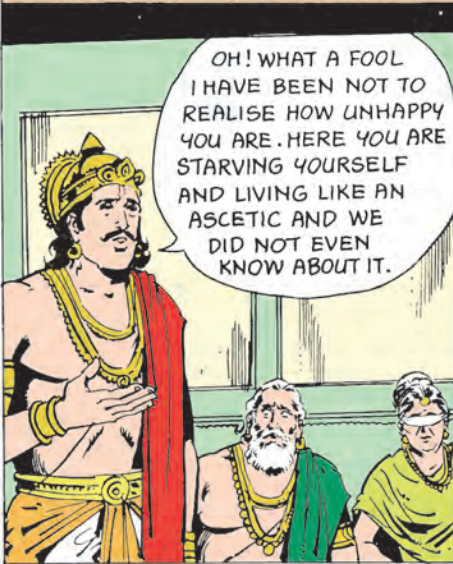
GANDHARI AND I WOULD LIKE TO RETIRE TO THE FOREST AND SPEND THE REST OF OUR DAYS IN PRAYER AND PENANCE.



A KING IS LIKE A VENERABLE TEACHER FOR ALL HIS SUBJECTS. SO, WE REQUEST YOU TO GRANT US PERMISSION TO LEAVE.



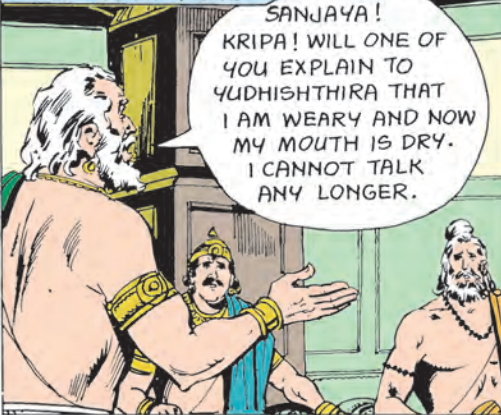
"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS VISIBLY UPSET."



"DHRTARASHTRA TRIED TO EXPLAIN."



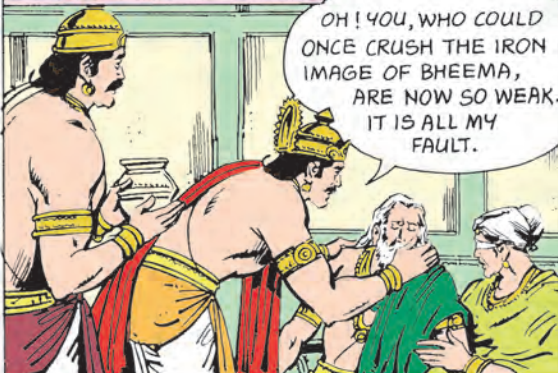
"FOR LONG DHRTARASHTRA TRIED TO PERSUADE YUDHISHTHIRA, WHO IN TURN PLEADED WITH HIM TO STAY ON. DHRTARASHTRA SAID—"



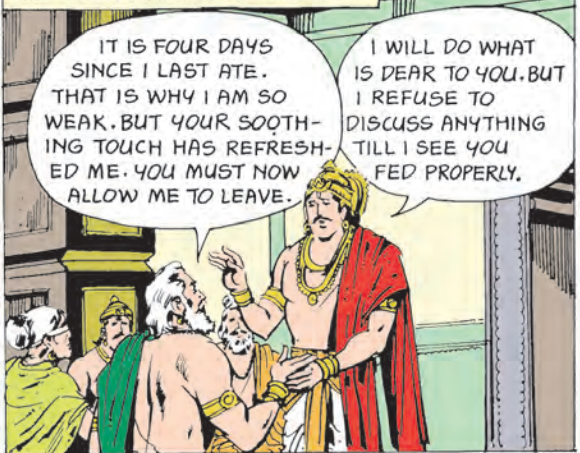
"WITH THESE WORDS, DHRTARASHTRA, ALMOST FAINT WITH FATIGUE, TURNED TO GANDHARI FOR SUPPORT."

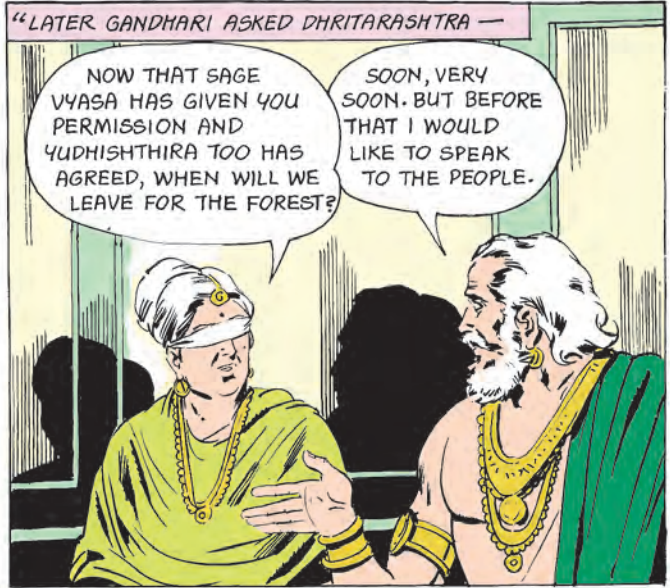
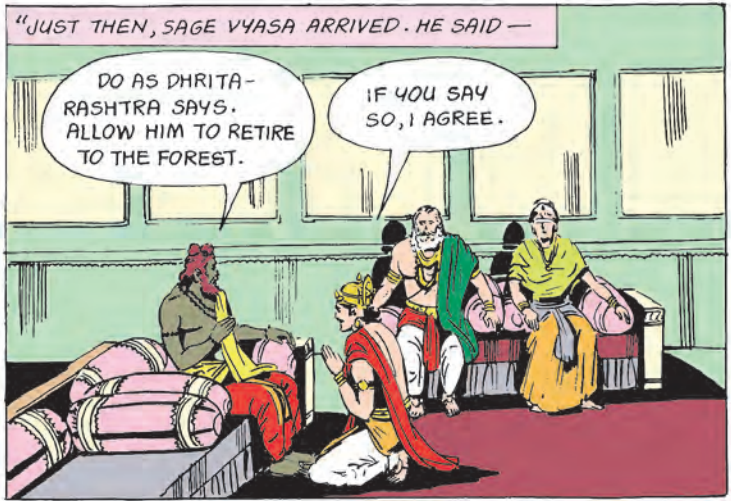
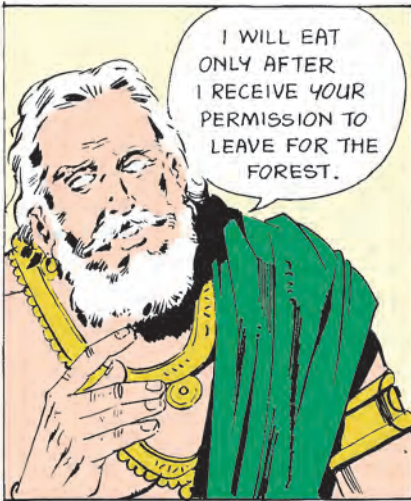


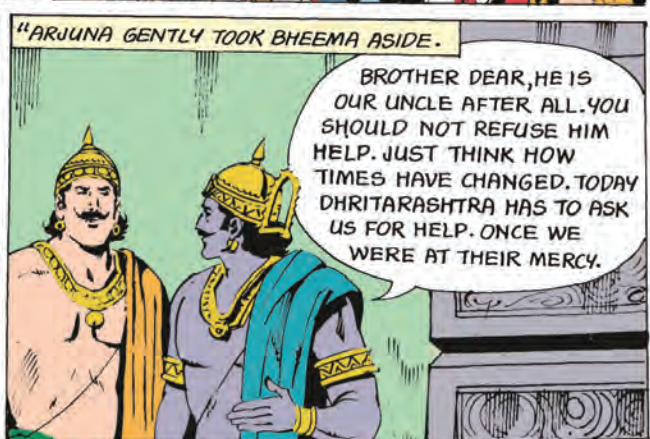
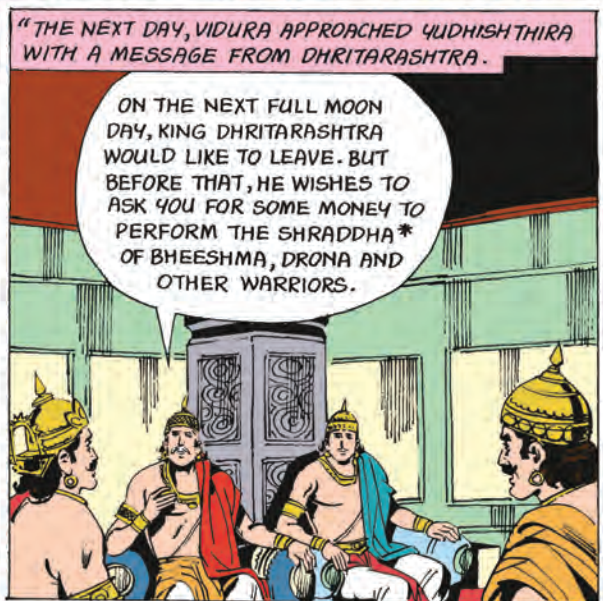
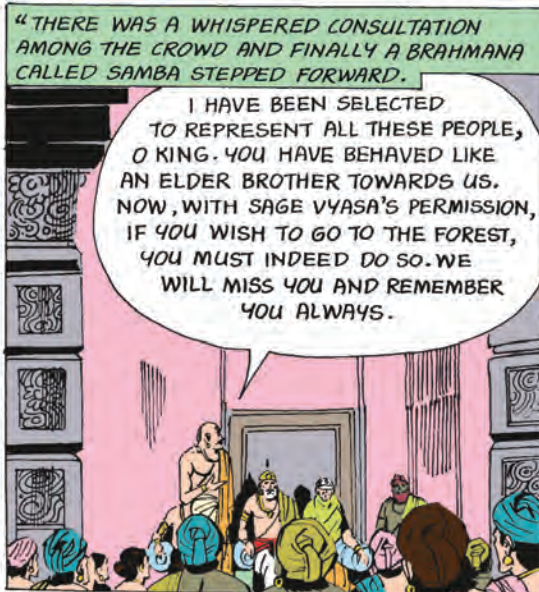
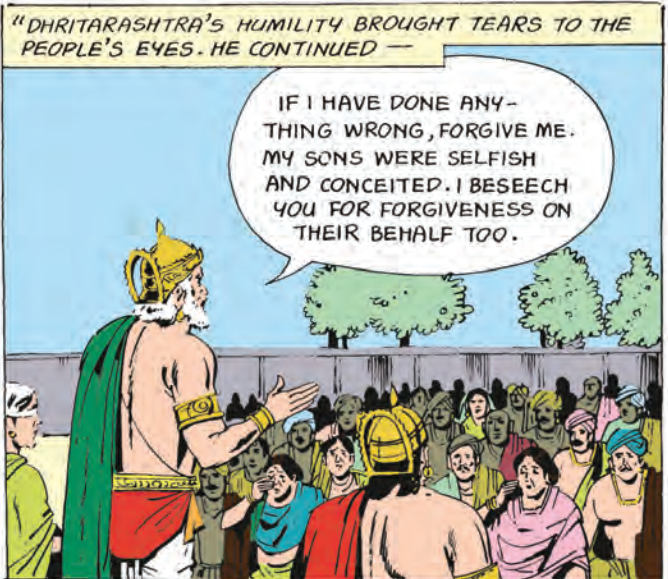
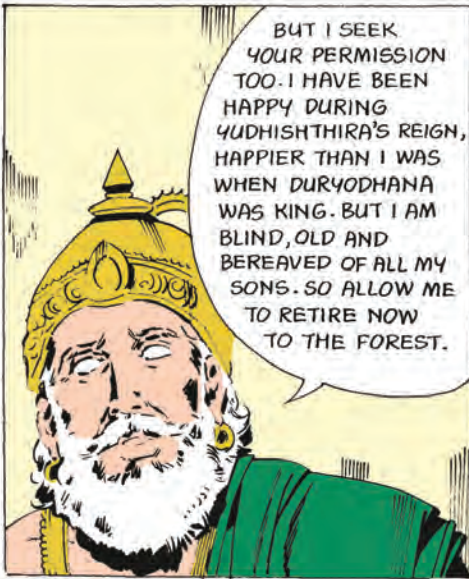
"YUDHISHTHIRA COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE HIM IN SUCH A STATE. HE TENDERLY WIPED THE OLD KING'S FACE WITH HIS HAND AFTER FIRST DIPPING IT IN COLD WATER."



"DHRTARASHTRA EXPLAINED—"







* RITES PERFORMED TO PLEASE THE DEAD ONES

"BHEEMA'S ANGER COULD NOT BE CONTAINED.

WE OURSELVES WILL PERFORM THE REQUIRED CEREMONIES. LEAVE THE OLD KING OUT OF IT.



"ONE BY ONE, BHEEMA BEGAN TO RECALL THE ACROCITIES HEAPED ON THEM BY THE KAURAVAS. YUDHISHTHIRA BECAME UNHAPPY.

KEEP QUIET, BHEEMA. THAT IS ENOUGH.



"THEN HE TURNED TO VIDURA AND SAID —

UNCLE, PLEASE TELL KING DHRITARASHTRA THAT HE CAN TAKE ANY AMOUNT OF MONEY AND MATERIALS FROM ME.



"VIDURA CONVEYED THIS NEWS TO DHRITARASHTRA WHO ARRANGED A TEN-DAY-LONG CEREMONY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE SOULS OF FALLEN WARRIORS.



"ON THE ELEVENTH DAY HE CALLED FOR THE PANDAVAS AND PREPARED TO LEAVE FOR THE FOREST.



"WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA SAW DHRITARASHTRA CLAD IN DEERSKIN, THE FINALITY OF THE DECISION STRUCK HIM.

OH! DO NOT LEAVE ME. DO NOT GO AWAY.



"ARJUNA COULD UNDERSTAND YUDHISHTHIRA'S EMOTIONAL STATE."

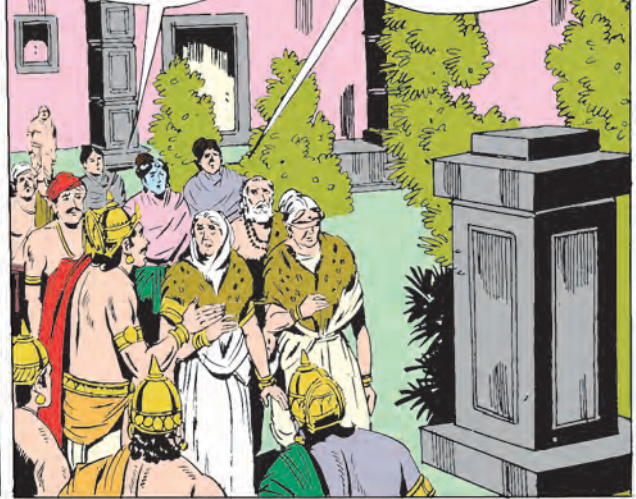
COME, BROTHER DEAR, DON'T BE SO RESTLESS.



"WHEN GANDHARI AND DHRTARASHTRA EMERGED FROM THE PALACE, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS SURPRISED TO SEE KUNTI LEADING THE WAY."

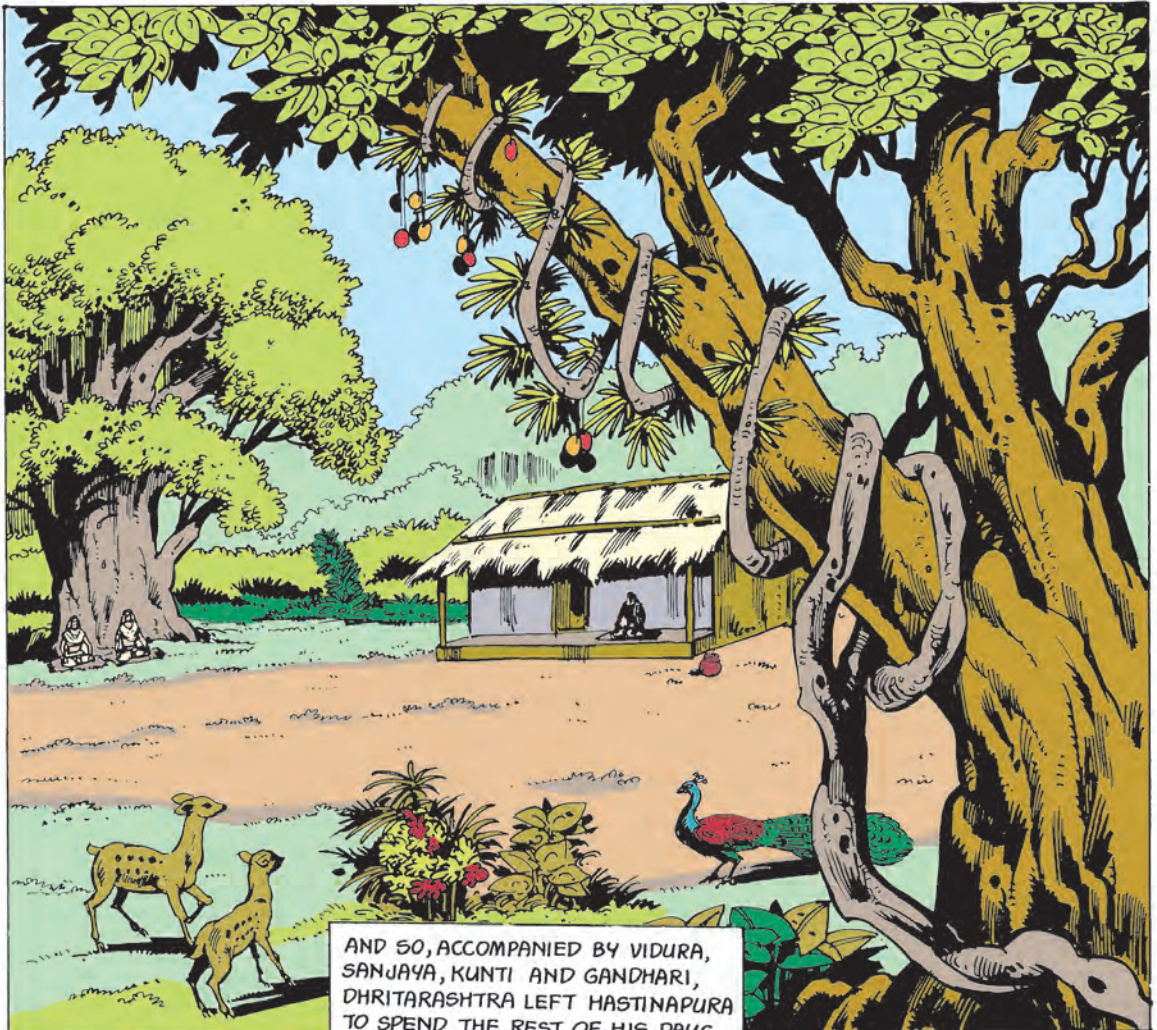
MOTHER, YOU ENCOURAGED US TO FIGHT AND WIN THIS THRONE. HOW CAN YOU LEAVE US NOW?

SON, WHATEVER I DID SO FAR WAS FOR YOUR SAFETY AND WELFARE. BUT NOW I MUST RETIRE TO THE FOREST.

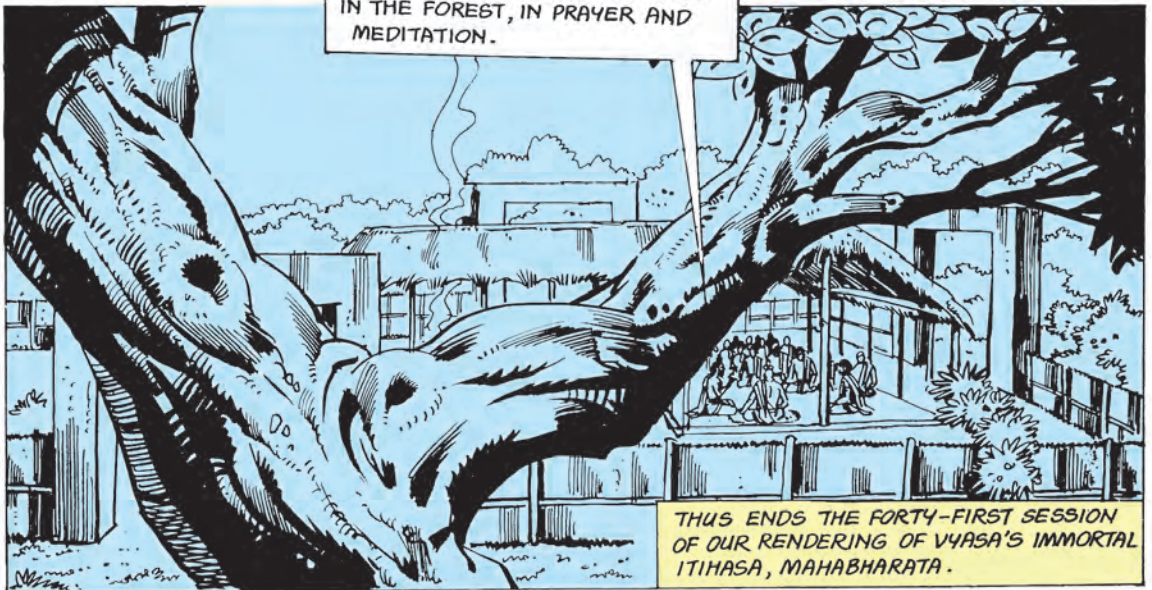


"AS KUNTI, GANDHARI AND DHRTARASHTRA SLOWLY WALKED AWAY FROM THE PALACE, THEY WERE FOLLOWED BY A WEEPING AND SOBBING CROWD OF PEOPLE."





AND SO, ACCOMPANIED BY VIDURA, SANJAYA, KUNTI AND GANDHARI, DHRTARASHTRA LEFT HASTINAPURA TO SPEND THE REST OF HIS DAYS IN THE FOREST, IN PRAYER AND MEDITATION.

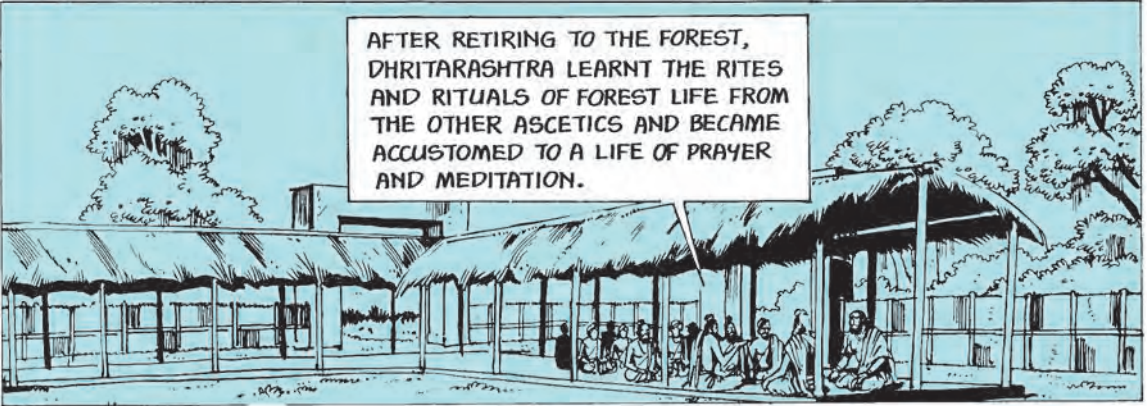


THUS ENDS THE FORTY-FIRST SESSION OF OUR RENDERING OF VYASA'S IMMORTAL ITIHASA, MAHABHARATA.

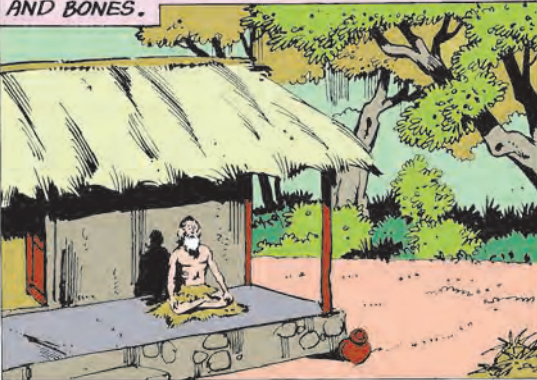
Mahabharata - 42

THE CELESTIAL REUNION

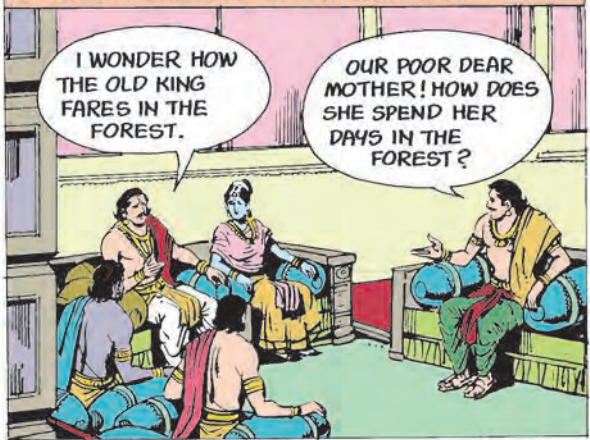
AFTER RETIRING TO THE FOREST, DHRTARASHTRA LEARNT THE RITES AND RITUALS OF FOREST LIFE FROM THE OTHER ASCETICS AND BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO A LIFE OF PRAYER AND MEDITATION.



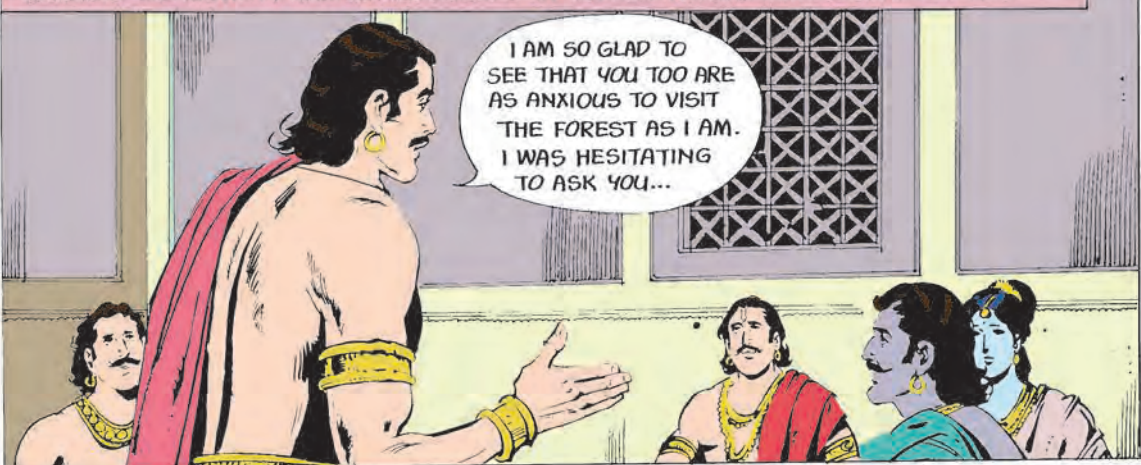
"GANDHARI, KUNTI, VIDURA AND SANJAYA, WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED HIM, ALSO ADOPTED AN AUSTERE LIFESTYLE. MONTHS OF SEVERE PENANCE REDUCED DHRTARASHTRA TO SKIN AND BONES.



"DHRTARASHTRA AND THE OTHERS WERE VERY OFTEN REMEMBERED BY THE PANDAVAS.



"READING THE ANXIETY AND RESTLESSNESS IN YUDHISHTHIRA'S MIND, SAHADEVA SAID —



"DRAUPADI SAID —

I TOO LONG TO
SEE OUR DEAR MOTHER
KUNTI. IN FACT, ALL THE
LADIES OF THE INNER
PALACE ARE WAITING
FOR THE DAY THEY CAN
MEET GANDHARI AND
KUNTI.

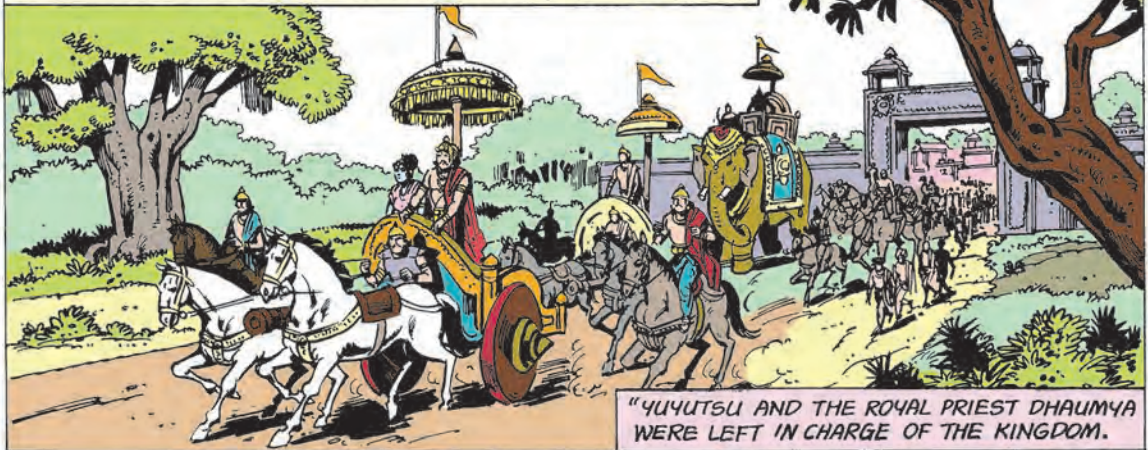


"YUDHISHTHIRA SENT FOR HIS ARMY CHIEF.

PREPARE YOUR MEN.
WE WILL LEAVE FOR THE
FOREST TOMORROW. WE WISH TO
VISIT KING DHRTIRASHTRA. LET AN
ANNOUNCEMENT BE MADE THAT
ALL CITIZENS OF HASTINAPURA
ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US.



"AT DAWN, A LONG CARAVAN OF CHARIOTS AND HORSES,
ELEPHANTS AND CAMELS WAS SEEN WINDING ITS WAY OUT
OF HASTINAPURA. BEHIND IT WERE MULES LADEN WITH GOODS.



"YUYUTSU AND THE ROYAL PRIEST DHAUMYA
WERE LEFT IN CHARGE OF THE KINGDOM.

"LEAVING THEIR HORSES AND CHARIOTS AT A DISTANCE, THE
PANDAVAS WALKED UP TO DHRTIRASHTRA'S HERMITAGE.



"YUDHISHTHIRA ENQUIRED OF THE SAGES THERE —

WHERE IS OUR DEAR UNCLE DHRITARASHTRA?

YOU WILL FIND HIM ON THE BANKS OF THE YAMUNA, BATHING AND GATHERING FLOWERS.



"WHILE THE OTHERS WALKED LEISURELY TOWARDS THE RIVER BANK, SAHADEVA RAN AHEAD TO GREET KUNTI.



"HE FELL AT HER FEET AND SOBBED LOUDLY.



"AFTER GREETING THE ELDERS WITH DUE RESPECT, THE PANDAVAS HELPED THEM TO CARRY THE WATER POTS BACK TO THE HERMITAGE.



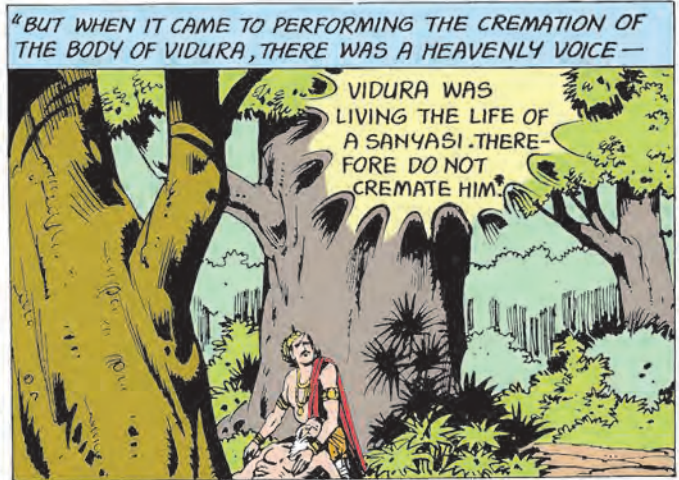
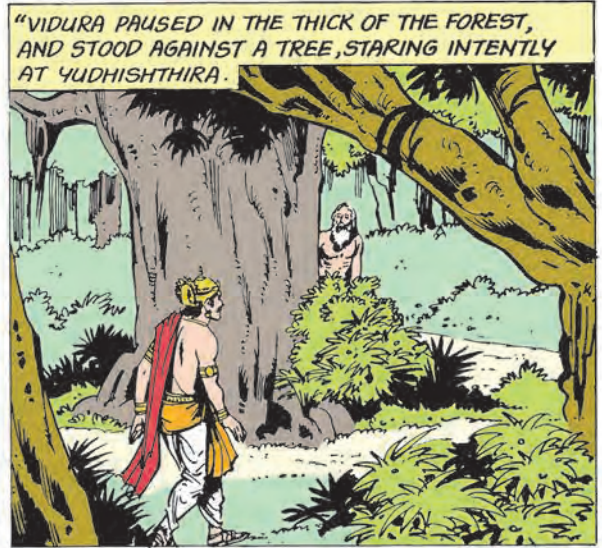
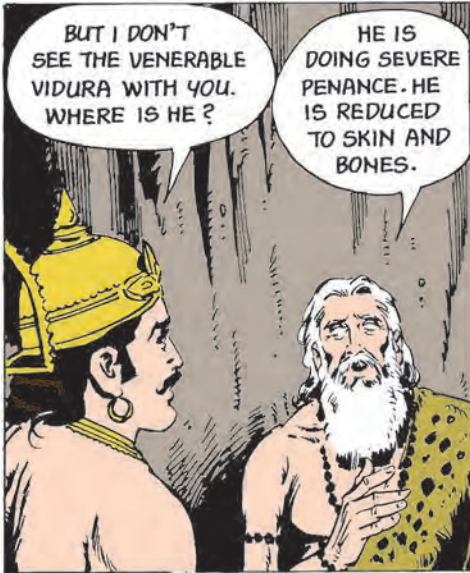
"DHRTARASHTRA SAID —

AH! HAVING ALL OF YOU AROUND ME MAKES ME FEEL I AM BACK IN THE PALACE.



"AT THE HERMITAGE, A CURIOUS CROWD HAD ALREADY GATHERED. SANJAYA INTRODUCED THE PANDAVAS TO THEM.





"THE DEATH OF VIDURA TOOK EVERYONE BY SURPRISE. YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS RETINUE SPENT THE NIGHT UNDER THE TREES.



"FOR A MONTH, YUDHISHTHIRA AND THE OTHERS STAYED IN THE FOREST VISITING VARIOUS ASHRAMAS AND BESTOWING GENEROUS GIFTS ON THE SAGES. THEN WITH THE PERMISSION AND BLESSINGS OF DHRTIRASHTRA AND GANDHARI, THEY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TO HASTINAPURA.



"TWO YEARS AFTER THEIR VISIT TO THE FOREST, SAGE NARADA VISITED YUDHISHTHIRA. ANXIOUSLY YUDHISHTHIRA ASKED HIM —

DID YOU SEE THE VENERABLE DHRTIRASHTRA? I HAVE HEARD THAT HE IS OBSERVING SEVERE PENANCE.

LISTEN CALMLY. I WILL GIVE YOU ALL THE NEWS.



AFTER YOU RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA, DHRTIRASHTRA, GANDHARI, KUNTI AND SANJAYA ALL LEFT FOR HARI-DWAR*.



"YOUR UNCLE DHRTIRASHTRA REDUCED HIMSELF TO A MERE SKELETON THROUGH STARVATION AND SEVERE PENANCE.

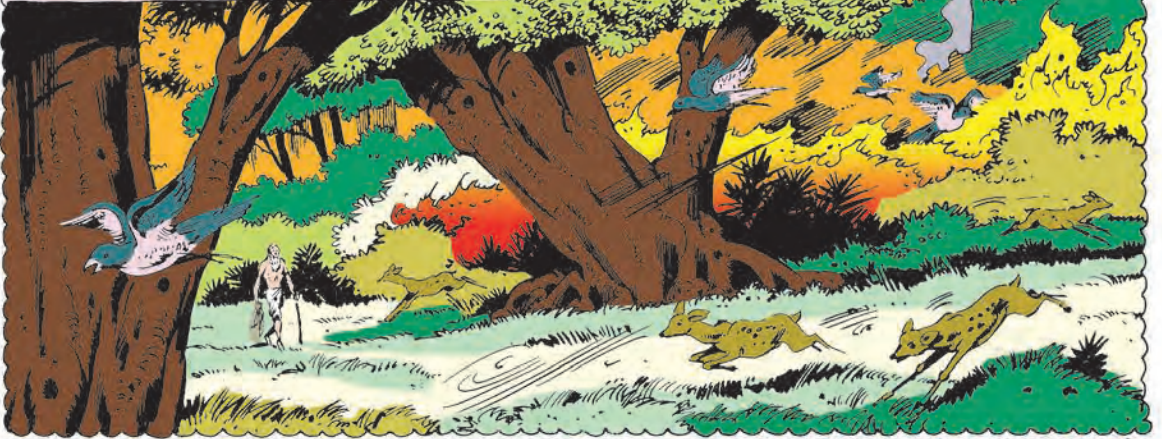


"GANDHARI, KUNTI AND SANJAYA ALSO SPENT THEIR DAYS IN FASTING AND PRAYER.



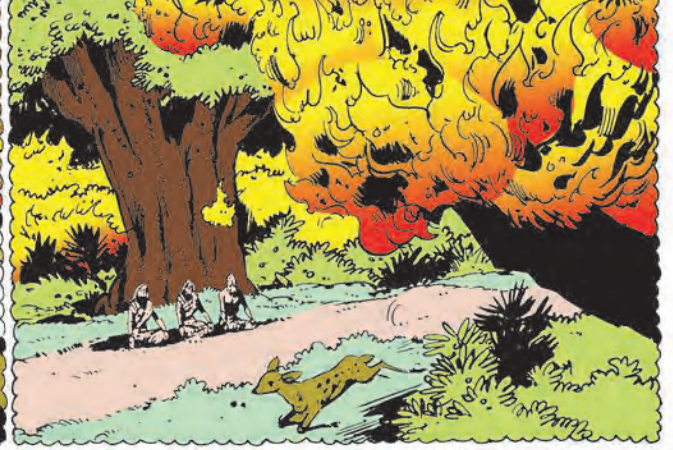
* A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOT HILLS, (NOW IN U.P.)

"ONE DAY WHEN DHRITARASHTRA WAS RETURNING TO HIS ASHRAMA AFTER HIS BATH, A STORM BROKE, AND WITH IT A FOREST FIRE. SOON, THE WHOLE FOREST WAS AFLAME.

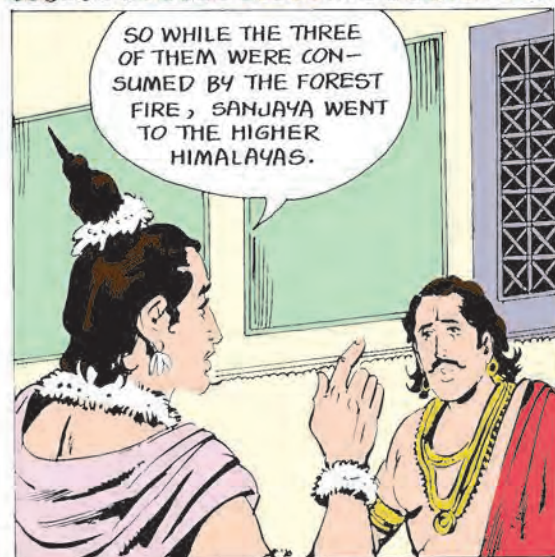


"SO WEAK AND HELPLESS HAD THEY BECOME THAT DHRITARASHTRA, KUNTI AND GANDHARI COULD NOT RUN AWAY.

"PERSUADING SANJAYA TO ESCAPE, THE THREE OF THEM SAT DOWN.



SO WHILE THE THREE OF THEM WERE CONSUMED BY THE FOREST FIRE, SANJAYA WENT TO THE HIGHER HIMALAYAS.



"THE NEWS CAME AS A REAL SHOCK TO YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS BROTHERS. THEY WERE REDUCED TO TEARS AND TRIED TO COMFORT ONE ANOTHER.



"YUDHISHTHIRA RETURNED TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES, BUT HIS HEART WAS NOT AT REST, FILLED AS IT WAS WITH SORROW. THE YEARS ROLLED BY UNEVENTFULLY. THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE GREAT WAR, ILL OMENS STARTED TO APPEAR.



"STORMS LASHED THE COUNTRYSIDE, METEORS STREAKED THROUGH THE SKY, THE SUN AND THE MOON TOO APPEARED TO BE SURROUNDED BY STRANGE RINGS.



"BUT WHEN THE NEWS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE VRISHNI CLAN REACHED THE PANDAVAS, THEIR GRIEF KNEW NO BOUNDS.



BUT HOW DID THAT HAPPEN? HOW COULD THE ENTIRE CLAN OF THE VRISHNIS BE SUDDENLY DESTROYED? WAS IT A RESULT OF SOME CURSE?

YES, IT HAPPENED MANY YEARS AGO WHEN SAGE VISHWAMITRA, KANVA AND NARADA HAD GONE TO DWARAKA FOR A VISIT.



"SOME MISCHIEVOUS YADAVA BOYS DRESSED UP SAMBA* AS A WOMAN AND TOOK HIM TO THE SAGES.

THIS IS BABHRU'S WIFE, AND SHE IS HOPING FOR A SON. YOU RISHIS ARE WISE MEN. TELL US WHETHER SHE WILL HAVE A BOY OR A GIRL.

WHAT DO THESE YOUNGSTERS THINK! HOW DARE THEY FOOL US THUS?



* A SON OF KRISHNA

"WITH RED-SHOT EYES, THE SAGES
DECLARED —

YOU CRUEL,
WICKED BOYS! THIS SON
OF KRISHNA WILL GIVE
BIRTH TO AN IRON PESTLE*
WHICH WILL CAUSE THE DESTRUCTION
OF ALL THE VRISHNI AND
ANDHAKA RACES. ONLY BALARAMA
AND KRISHNA WILL BE SPARED.
BALARAMA WILL CONSIGN HIM-
SELF TO THE SEA, AND KRISHNA
WILL BE KILLED BY A HUNTER
WHILE HE IS LYING DOWN.



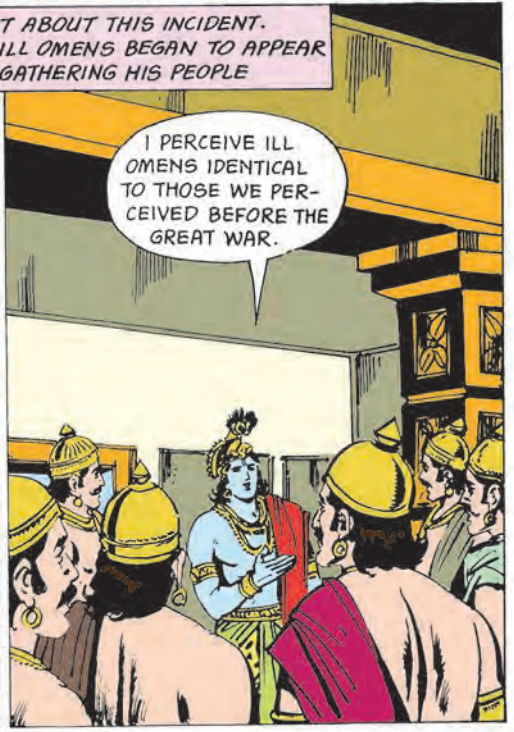
"SURELY ENOUGH THE NEXT MORNING, SAMBA GAVE BIRTH
TO AN IRON PESTLE. HIS COMPANIONS RUSHED UP TO
KING UGRASENA AND GAVE THE PESTLE TO HIM.



"AFRAID OF ITS ALLEGED POWER OF DESTRUCTION, THE
KING ORDERED THE IRON PESTLE TO BE CRUSHED INTO
POWDER, AND TO BE CAST INTO THE SEA. WITH A VIEW
TO PREVENT DRUNKEN BRAWLS A PUBLIC PROCLAMATION
WAS MADE THAT LIQUOR SHOULD NOT THEREAFTER BE
PREPARED OR CONSUMED
IN THE KINGDOM.



"IN COURSE OF TIME, THE DENIZENS OF DWARAKA FORGOT ABOUT THIS INCIDENT.
BUT WHEN THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE GREAT WAR, ILL OMENS BEGAN TO APPEAR
IN DWARAKA TOO, KRISHNA REALISED THE SIGNIFICANCE. GATHERING HIS PEOPLE
TOGETHER, HE SAID —



I PERCEIVE ILL
OMENS IDENTICAL
TO THOSE WE PER-
CEIVED BEFORE THE
GREAT WAR.

* TOOL USED FOR POUNDING IN A MORTAR.

"THEN HE PONDERED FOR A WHILE."



WHY! IT IS THIRTY-SIX YEARS SINCE THAT GREAT BATTLE. IT IS NOW TIME FOR GANDHARI'S CURSE TO TAKE EFFECT.

I FEEL IT IS BEST FOR ALL OF US TO GO ON A PILGRIMAGE. LET ALL OF US GATHER TOGETHER AT PRABHASA*.



"THE HEADS OF THE FAMILIES OF VRISHNIS AND ANDHAKAS WERE WILLING TO ABIDE BY HIS DECISION. HECTIC PREPARATIONS WERE SOON UNDER WAY."



"MOUNTED ON HORSES, ELEPHANTS AND CHARIOTS, THE ARMY TOO PREPARED TO LEAVE THE TOWN."



"ON REACHING PRABHASA, THEY SET UP CAMP AND SETTLED DOWN. THEN BEGAN THE FEASTING AND DRINKING IN WHICH KRISHNA, BALARAMA, SATYAKI AND KRITAVARMA ALSO JOINED."



* A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE NEAR DWARAKA

"SATYAKI, QUITE DRUNK, TOOK IT TO HIS HEAD TO INSULT KRITAVARMA."

I HAVE YET TO SEE ANOTHER KSHATRIYA WHO WOULD KILL HIS HAPLESS ENEMIES WHILE THEY ARE ASLEEP. WHAT YOU DID WAS UNFORGIVABLE.



"WILD WITH FURY, KRITAVARMA RETORTED—"

DIDN'T YOU KILL BHOORISHRAVA AFTER HE HAD LAID DOWN HIS WEAPONS? DO YOU THINK YOU WERE VERY BRAVE THEN?

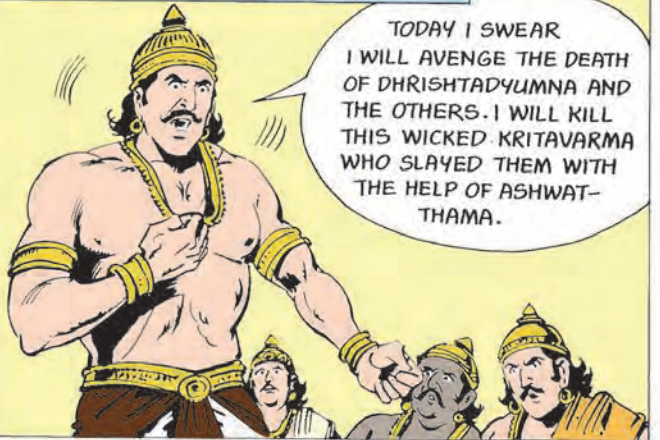


"THE OTHERS BEGAN TAKING SIDES AND A DRUNKEN BRAWL WAS SOON ON."



"SATYAKI SPRANG UP WITH A LIVID FACE."

TODAY I SWEAR I WILL AVENGE THE DEATH OF DHRISTADYUMNA AND THE OTHERS. I WILL KILL THIS WICKED KRITAVARMA WHO SLAYED THEM WITH THE HELP OF ASHWATTHAMA.



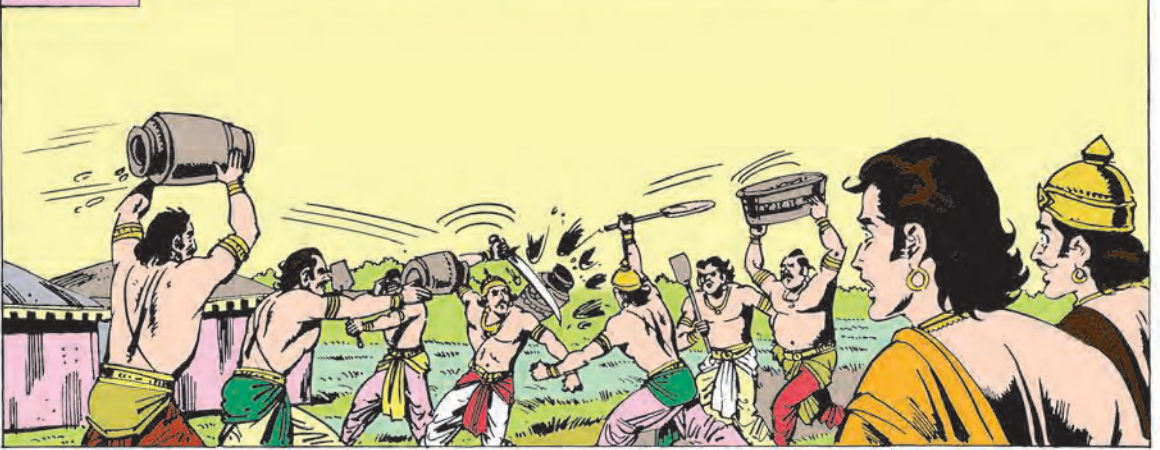
"SWIFTLY SATYAKI TOOK THE SWORD FROM KRISHNA AND IN AN INSTANT, CUT OFF KRITAVARMA'S HEAD."



"THEN, CRAZY WITH ANGER AND DRINK, HE BEGAN ATTACKING EVERYONE AROUND."



"KRISHNA HASTENED TO CONTROL HIM, BUT JUST THEN THE ANDHAKAS SURROUNDED SATYAKI. IN THEIR DRUNKEN STATE, THEY ATTACKED HIM WITH THE POTS AND PANS THAT WERE LYING AROUND."



"TO PROTECT SATYAKI, KRISHNA'S SON PRADYUMNA JUMPED INTO THE FRAY."



"THOUGH THEY WERE BOTH STRONG AND VALOROUS, SATYAKI AND PRADYUMNA WERE SOON OUT-NUMBERED AND KILLED."



"ENRAGED BY THE KILLING OF HIS SON AND FRIEND, KRISHNA PLUCKED A CLUMP OF ERAKA* GRASS."



"NO SOONER HAD THE GRASS TOUCHED HIS HAND, THAN IT TURNED INTO A FORMIDABLE IRON PESTLE."



"HOLDING THE IRON WEAPON ALOFT, KRISHNA ATTACKED ALL THOSE WHO CONFRONTED HIM.



"THEREAFTER, WHOSEVER PULLED UP A TUFT OF THAT GRASS, FOUND HIMSELF ARMED WITH A TERRIBLE WEAPON.



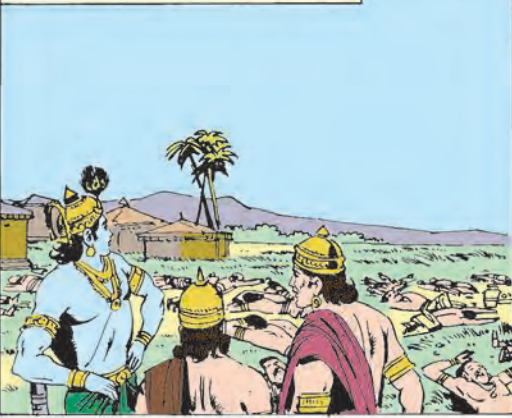
"DRIVEN BY DESTINY, THE VRISHNI CLAN ATTACKED ONE ANOTHER.



"WHILE THE FIGHT REACHED ITS CLIMAX, KRISHNA STOOD BY, WATCHING SILENTLY AS FATHER KILLED SON, AND BROTHER ATTACKED BROTHER WITH IRON RODS.



"SOON, HOWEVER, KRISHNA'S SONS SAMBA, CHARUDESHNA AND HIS GRAND-SON ANIRUDDHA WERE ALSO KILLED - ONLY DARUKA, KRISHNA'S CHARIOTEER, AND BABHRU, THE MINISTER OF THE YADAVAS, REMAINED ALIVE.

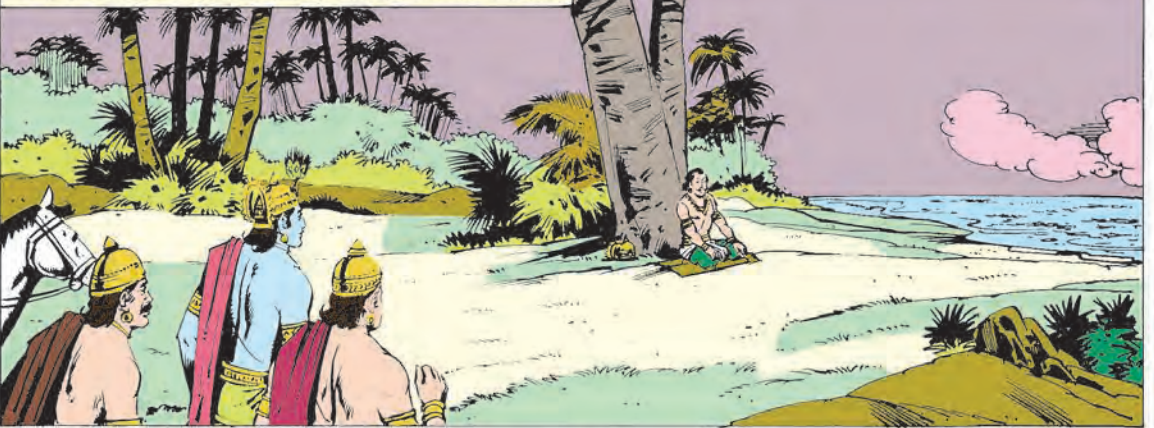


"DARUKA SAID -

ALL ARE DEAD NOW, O LORD, BUT BALARAMA IS NOT TO BE SEEN. COME, LET US GO AND LOOK FOR HIM.



"THEY SOON FOUND HIM NEAR THE SEA SHORE.



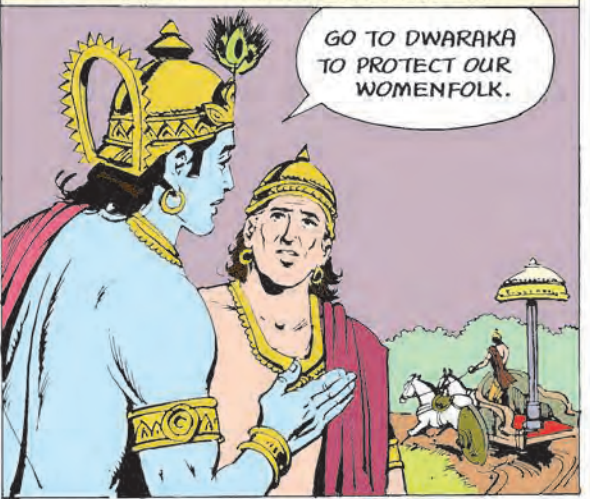
"KRISHNA SAID -

DARUKA, GO AT ONCE TO HASTINAPURA AND TELL ARJUNA ABOUT THIS TERRIBLE CARNAGE. ASK HIM TO RUSH TO DWARAKA.

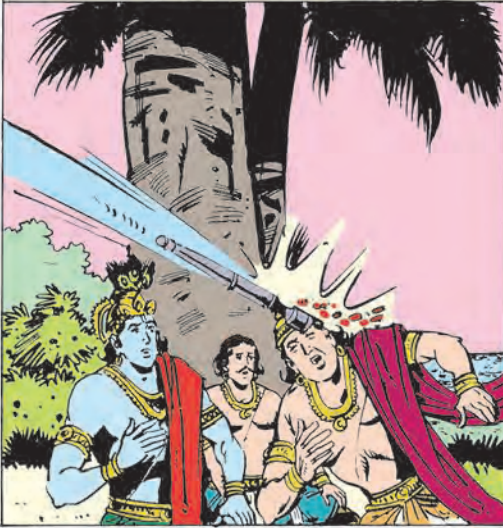


"DARUKA AT ONCE ASCENDED HIS CHARIOT AND LEFT. TURNING TO BABHRU, KRISHNA SAID -

GO TO DWARAKA TO PROTECT OUR WOMENFOLK.

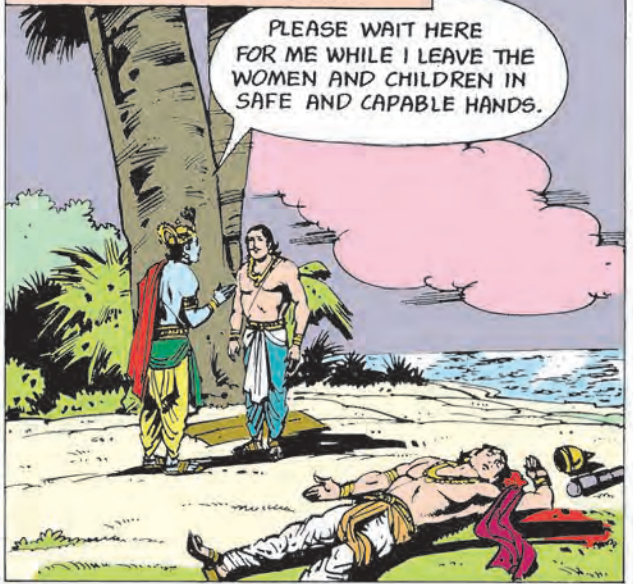


"BEFORE HE COULD EVEN STIR, BABHRU WAS FELLED BY AN IRON ROD WHICH HAD GOT STUCK TO A HUNTER'S ARROW.



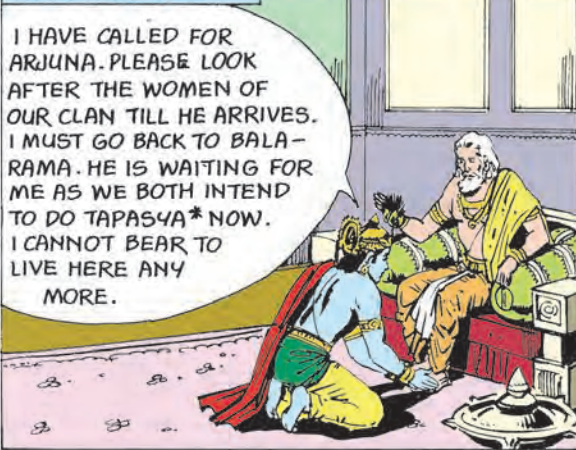
"KRISHNA SAID TO BALARAMA —

PLEASE WAIT HERE FOR ME WHILE I LEAVE THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SAFE AND CAPABLE HANDS.

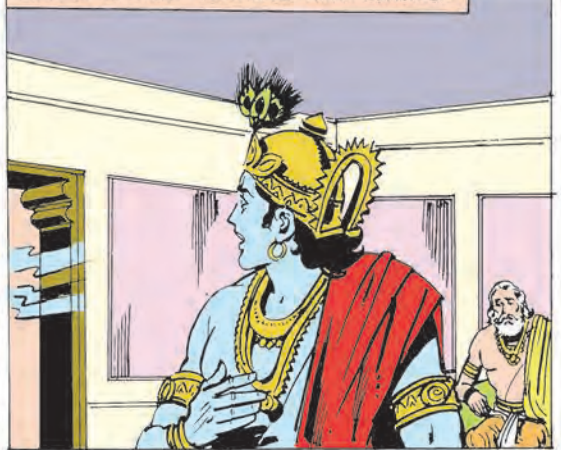


"KRISHNA RETURNED TO DWARAKA AND TO HIS FATHER VASUDEVA.

I HAVE CALLED FOR ARJUNA. PLEASE LOOK AFTER THE WOMEN OF OUR CLAN TILL HE ARRIVES. I MUST GO BACK TO BALARAMA. HE IS WAITING FOR ME AS WE BOTH INTEND TO DO TAPASYA* NOW. I CANNOT BEAR TO LIVE HERE ANY MORE.



"AS KRISHNA WAS ABOUT TO RUSH BACK, HE HEARD A LOUD WAILING AND CRYING.



"HE FOUND THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN HUDDLED TOGETHER, WEEPING HELPLESSLY. CONSOLING THEM, HE SAID —

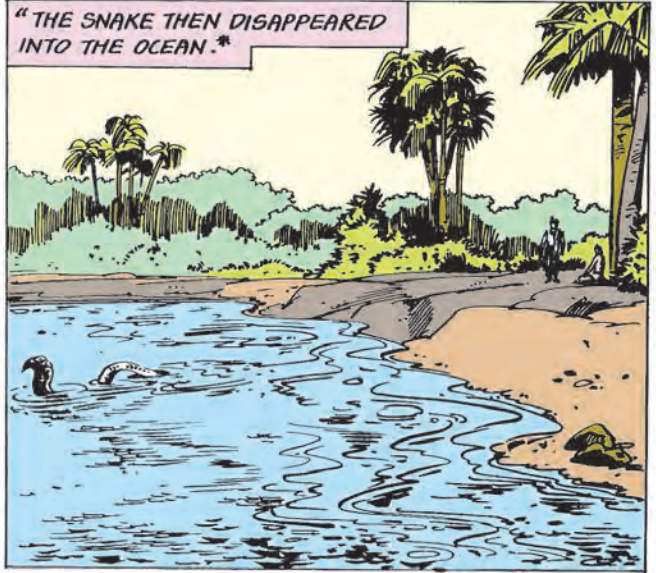
CALM YOURSELF. ARJUNA WILL SOON BE HERE. HE WILL PROTECT YOU.



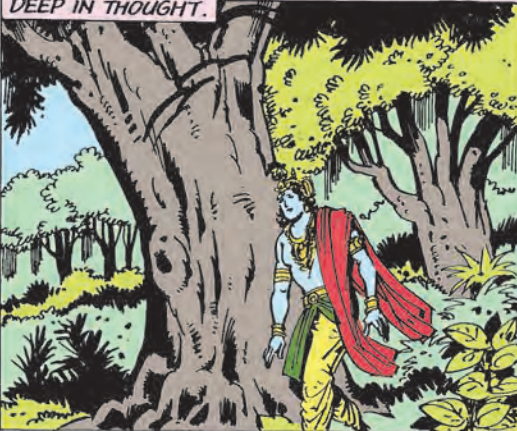
"WHEN KRISHNA RUSHED BACK TO BALARAMA, HE SAW A GREAT WHITE SERPENT EMERGING FROM HIS MOUTH."



"THE SNAKE THEN DISAPPEARED INTO THE OCEAN."



"AFTER WITNESSING THE END OF BALARAMA, KRISHNA REALISED THAT HIS TIME TOO HAD COME. HE WANDERED OFF INTO THE FOREST DEEP IN THOUGHT."



"AFTER ROAMING AROUND AIMLESSLY, HE SAT DOWN AND REMEMBERED GANDHARI'S CURSE."



"WHEN HIS MIND TURNED TO THE PAST, KRISHNA DISCIPLINED HIS SENSES AND LAY DOWN IN A YOGIC POSE."



"JUST THEN A HUNTER CALLED JARA ARRIVED ON THE SCENE IN SEARCH OF A DEER."

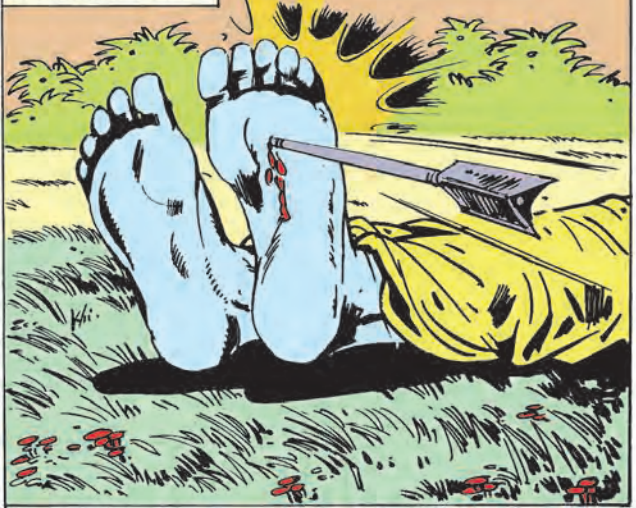


* AS KRISHNA WAS THE INCARNATION OF VISHNU, BALARAMA WAS BELIEVED TO BE THE INCARNATION OF SHESHA, THE SERPENT ON WHICH VISHNU RECLINES

"CAMOUFLAGED BY THE FOLIAGE, HE MISTOOK THE SUPINE KRISHNA FOR A DEER, AND SHOT AN ARROW IN THAT DIRECTION."



"THE ARROW PIERCED THROUGH THE SOLE OF KRISHNA'S FOOT."



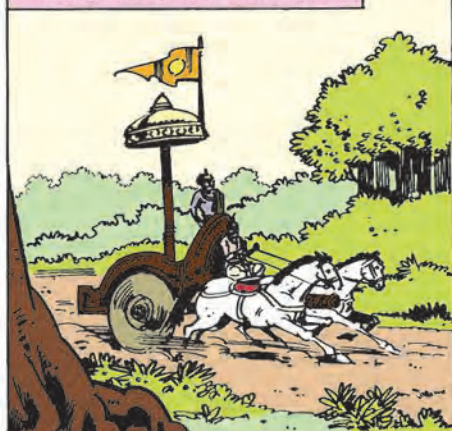
"WHEN JARA THE HUNTER CAME NEAR, HE REALISED HIS MISTAKE AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS. AFTER CONSOLING THE HUNTER, KRISHNA'S SOUL DEPARTED FROM HIS BODY. THUS, LORD KRISHNA TOO MET HIS END IN THE MANNER PREDICTED BY GANDHARI."



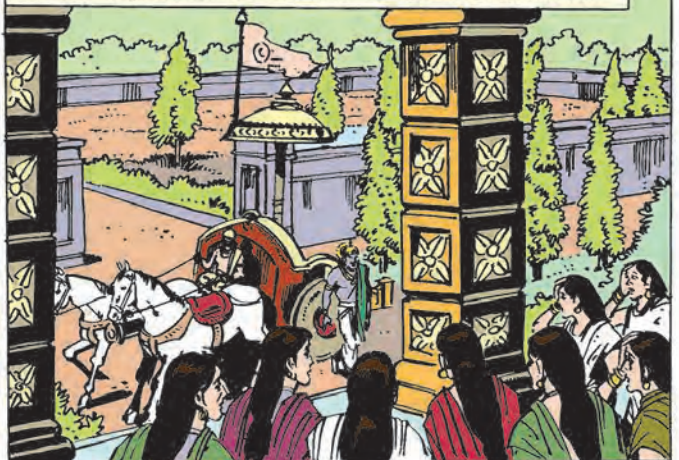
"MEANWHILE DARUKA, WHO HAD REACHED HASTINAPURA, REPORTED TO THE PANDAVAS THE TERRIBLE EVENTS THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE."



"SHOCKED TO HEAR THIS TERRIBLE NEWS, ARJUNA ACCOMPANIED DARUKA BACK TO DWARAKA."



"IN DWARAKA THOUSANDS OF WOMEN, FORLORN AND DESERTED, LAMENTED ALOUD ON SEEING ARJUNA."



"EVEN THE STOUT-HEARTED ARJUNA COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE THEIR GRIEF. OVERCOME WITH SORROW AND SYMPATHY, HE FELL DOWN IN A SWOON."



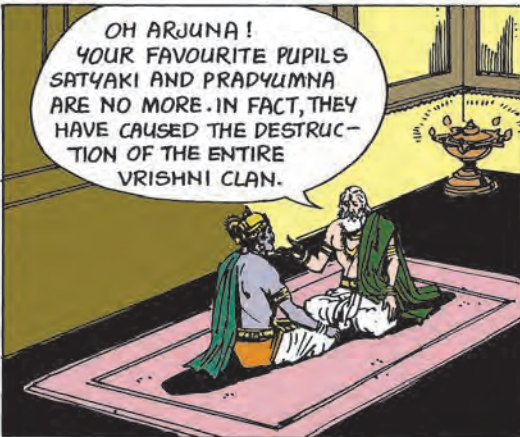
"RUKMINI AND THE OTHER QUEENS RAN TO HELP HIM UP. THEY SEATED HIM ON A GOLDEN ASANA AND SAT BESIDE HIM IN SILENT SYMPATHY."



"ON RECOVERING, ARJUNA WENT TO MEET HIS UNCLE VASUDEVA. WHEN ARJUNA GREETED HIM, THE GRIEF-STRICKEN VASUDEVA CLASPED HIM TO HIS BOSOM."



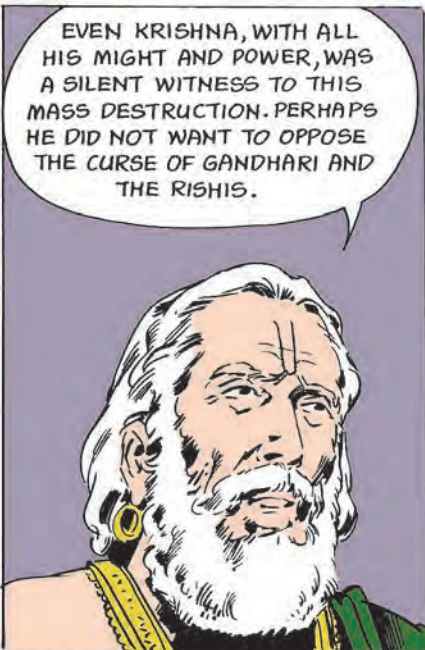
OH ARJUNA! YOUR FAVOURITE PUPILS SATYAKI AND PRADYUMNA ARE NO MORE. IN FACT, THEY HAVE CAUSED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ENTIRE VRISHNI CLAN.



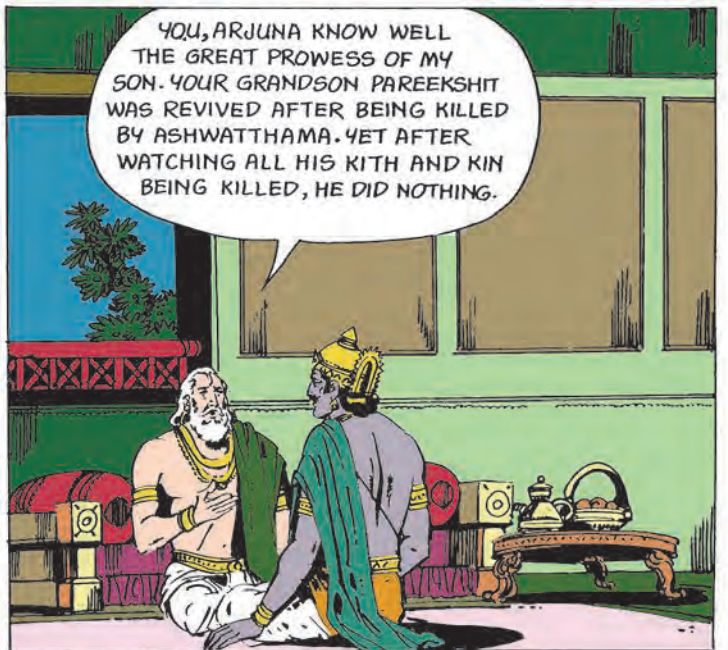
BUT THEN WE CANNOT BLAME THEM. WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS AN OUTCOME OF THE CURSE OF THE RISHIS.

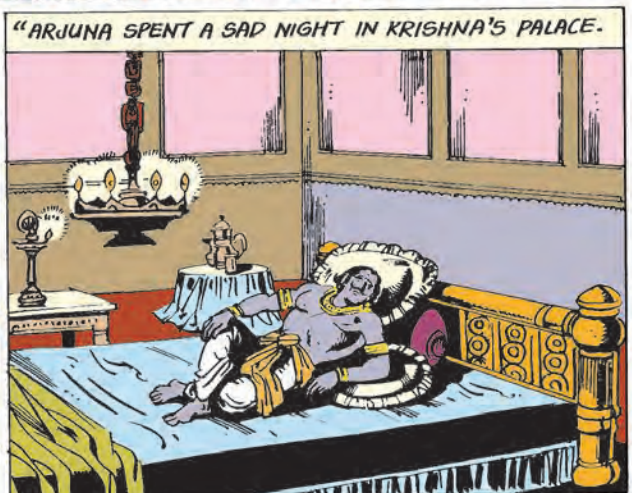
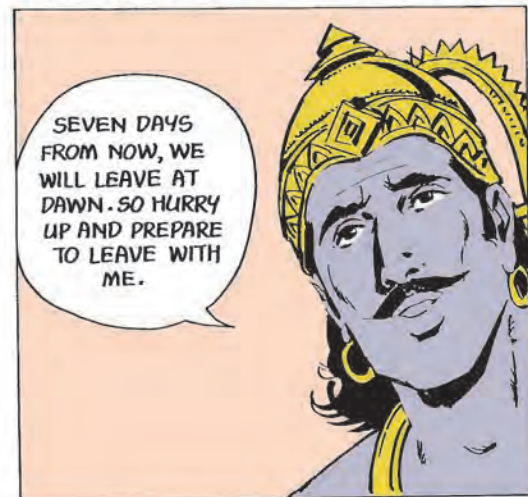
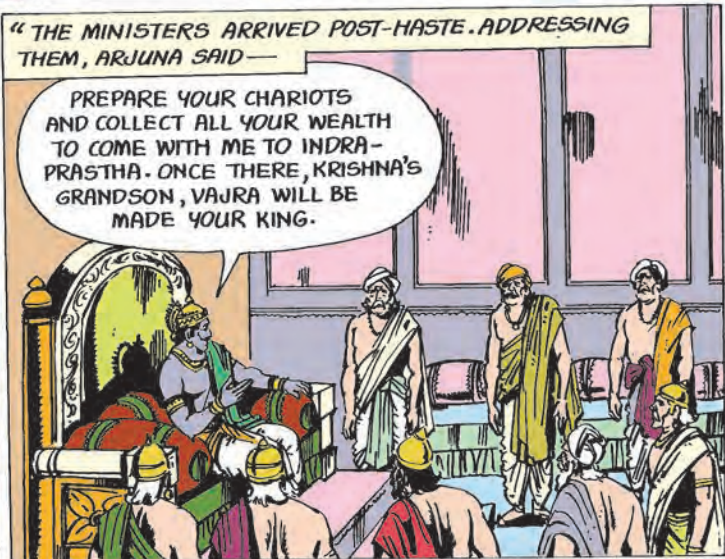
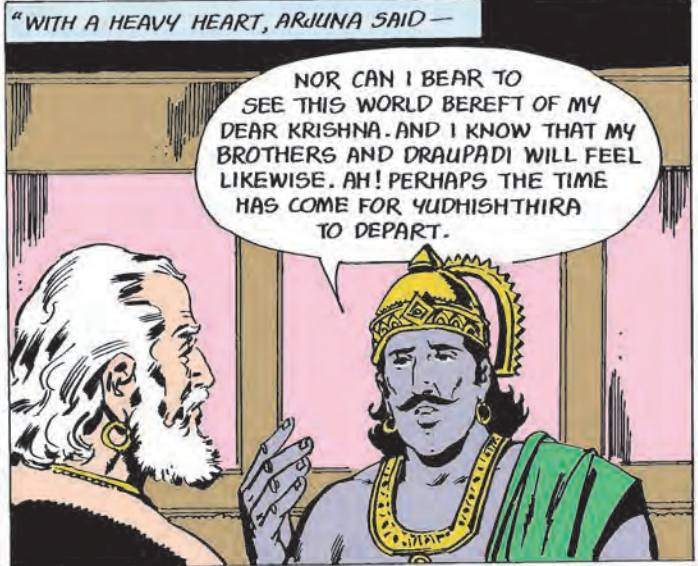


EVEN KRISHNA, WITH ALL HIS MIGHT AND POWER, WAS A SILENT WITNESS TO THIS MASS DESTRUCTION. PERHAPS HE DID NOT WANT TO OPPOSE THE CURSE OF GANDHARI AND THE RISHIS.



YOU, ARJUNA KNOW WELL THE GREAT PROWESS OF MY SON. YOUR GRANDSON PAREEKSHIT WAS REVIVED AFTER BEING KILLED BY ASHWATTHAMA. YET AFTER WATCHING ALL HIS KITH AND KIN BEING KILLED, HE DID NOTHING.





"EARLY NEXT MORNING, VASUDEVA BREATHED HIS LAST."



"AFTER PERFORMING THE OBSEQUIES FOR VASUDEVA, ARJUNA WENT TO THE SPOT WHERE THE VRISHNIS HAD MET WITH THEIR DESTRUCTION."



"THERE TOO HE PERFORMED THE FINAL RITES FOR ALL THE DEAD. AFTER SEARCHING FOR KRISHNA AND BALARAMA, ARJUNA PRESUMED THEM TO BE DEAD, AND PERFORMED THE LAST RITES FOR THEM TOO."



"SEVEN DAYS LATER, ARJUNA LEFT DWARAKA. FOLLOWING HIM WERE NUMEROUS CHARIOTS OF THE CITIZENS OF DWARAKA."



"NO SOONER HAD THE SEA OF HUMANITY CROSSED THE LIMITS OF DWARAKA THAN THE CITY BEGAN TO SUBMERGE IN THE OCEAN."



HURRY! HURRY!
THE SEA IS
COMING CLOSER!

STRANGE
ARE THE
WAYS OF
GOD!

"TRAVERSING THE VARIOUS MOUNTAINS AND RIVERSIDES, ARJUNA LED HIS RETINUE TO THE LAND OF FIVE RIVERS. WHEN THEY ESTABLISHED CAMP THERE, THEY WERE SET UPON BY A GROUP OF ROBBERS. WHEN ARJUNA TRIED TO USE HIS CELESTIAL WEAPONS TO COUNTER THEIR ATTACK, HE STOOD TRANSFIXED."

WHY, I CAN'T REMEMBER A
THING. HOW CAN MY
MEMORY FAIL ME AT THIS
CRUCIAL MOMENT?



"WHILE THE DACOITS CONTINUED THE ATTACK ...



...ARJUNA STOOD BY, HELPLESS. THEN HE TRIED TO ATTACK THE LOOTERS WITH ORDINARY WEAPONS. BUT SOON HIS QUIVERS, WHICH EARLIER HAD BEEN INEXHAUSTIBLE BECAME EMPTY.



"GRADUALLY, REALISATION DAWNED ON ARJUNA.



ALL THIS IS SURELY DIVINELY ORDAINED. I CANNOT RECALL THE CELESTIAL WEAPONS; MY VERY LIMBS FEEL WEAK. AH! ALL THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARTS OF WAR I HAD ACQUIRED IS NOT TO BE RELIED UPON, AFTER ALL.

"HAPLESSLY, HE GATHERED TOGETHER THE PEOPLE WHO WERE LEFT AND TOOK THEM TO INDRAPRASTHA WHERE VAURA, SON OF ANIRUDDHA, WAS LATER CROWNED KING.



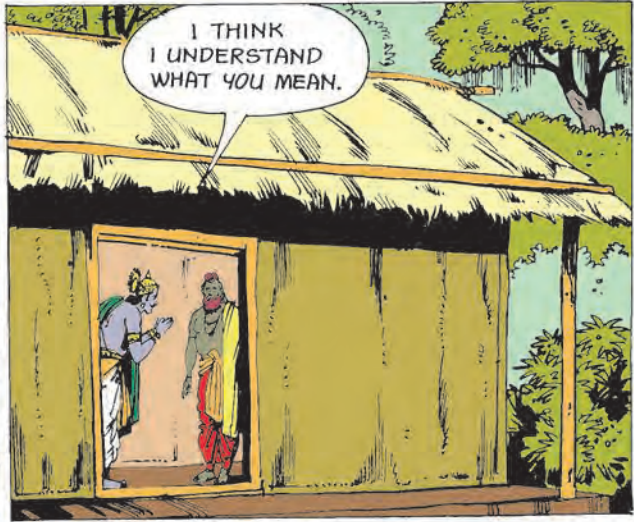
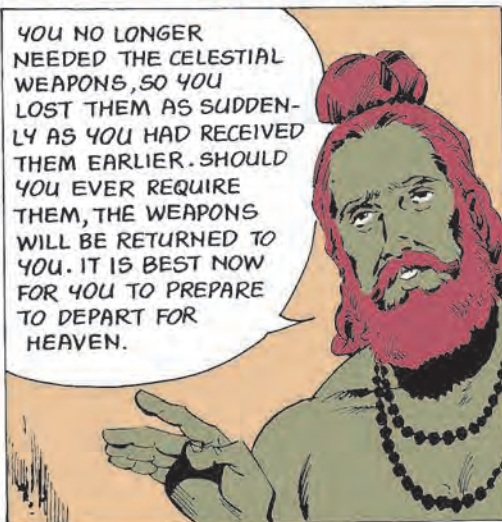
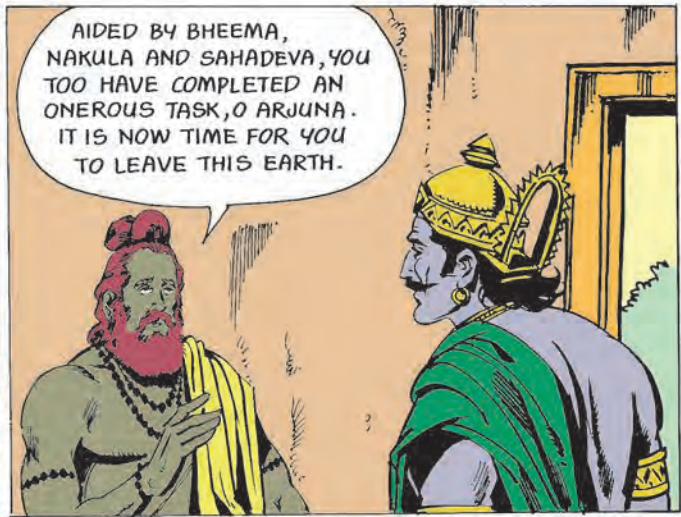
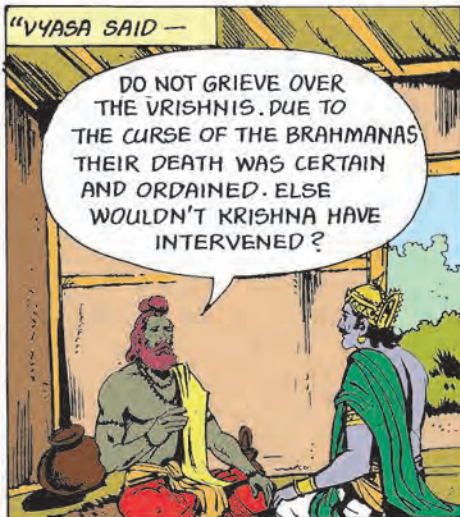
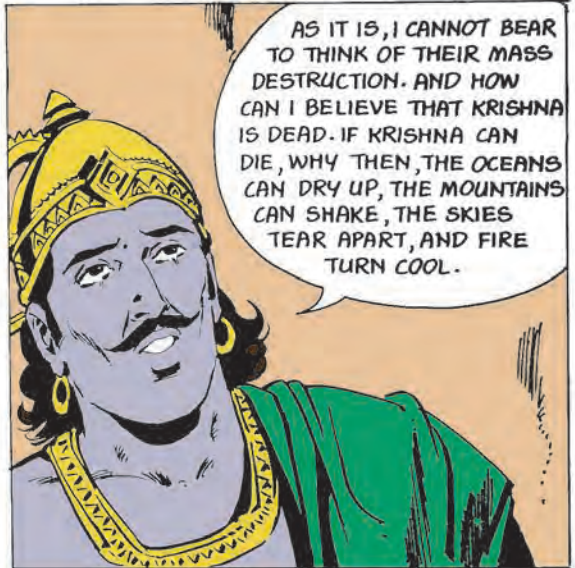
"AFTER MAKING ALL THE REQUISITE ARRANGEMENTS, ARJUNA MADE HIS WAY TO VEDAVYASA'S ASHRAMA.



"WHILE ARJUNA GREETED HIM WITH DUE RESPECT, VYASA SHREWDLY DETECTED THE RESTLESSNESS IN HIS MIND.



IS ANYTHING THE MATTER, ARJUNA? WHY DO YOU LOOK SO CREST-FALLEN? WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?



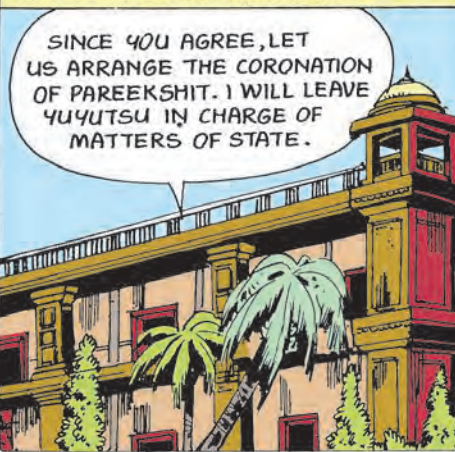
"ARJUNA RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA AND NARRATED ALL THE EVENTS TO YUDHISHTHIRA.



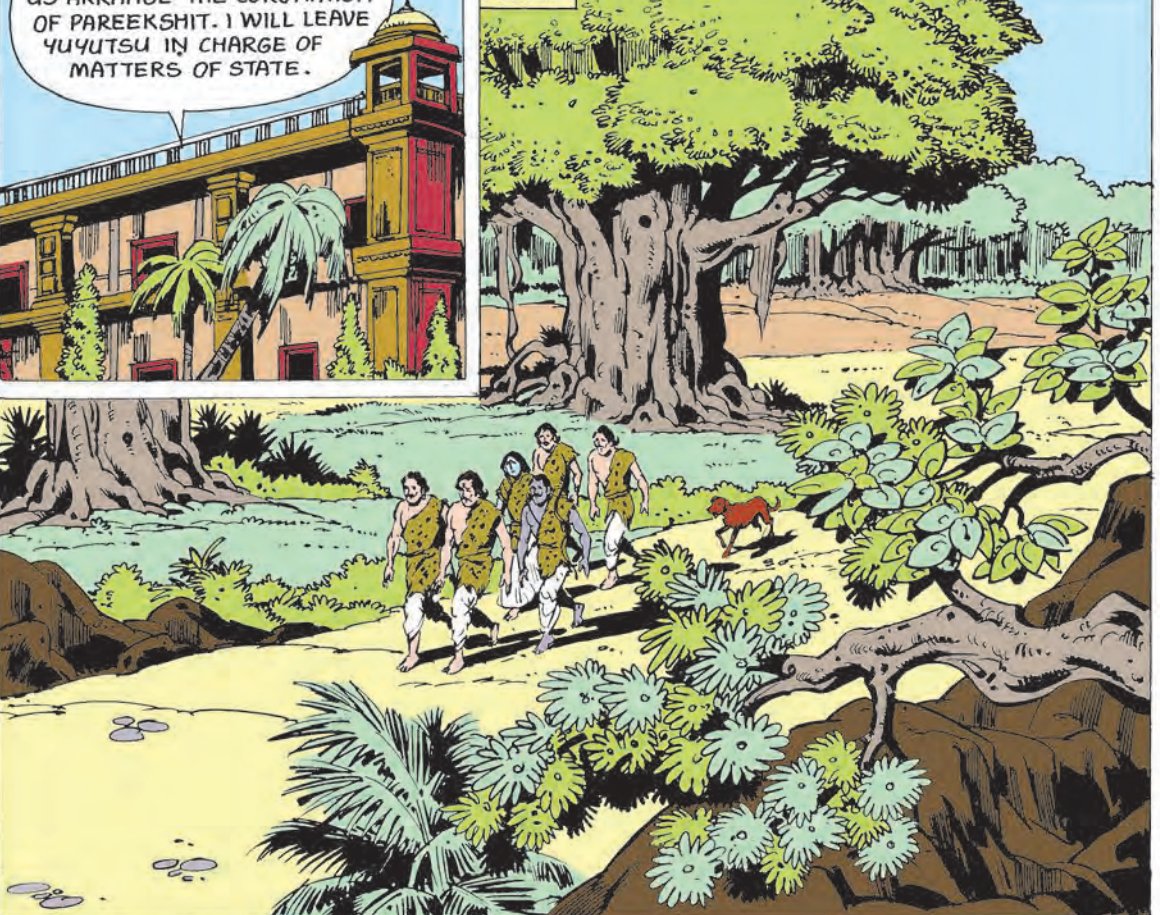
"YUDHISHTHIRA HEARD HIM AND SAID SOLEMNLY —



"BHEEMA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA ALSO AGREED. YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —



"DISCARDING HIS SILKS AND JEWELS, YUDHISHTHIRA DONNED CLOTHES OF BARK. HIS BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI DID LIKEWISE. THEN ALL THE FIVE OF THEM, ALONG WITH DRAUPADI, SET OFF ON THE JOURNEY. A DOG FOLLOWED THEM.



"CROSSING RIVERS AND PLAINS, THEY TRAVELLED ACROSS THE COUNTRY. ARJUNA WAS STILL CARRYING WITH HIM HIS GANDEEVA AND QUIVERS. THE PANDAVAS MET AGNI ON THE WAY, AND HE ASKED ARJUNA TO GIVE AWAY THE GANDEEVA TO VARUNA.



"ARJUNA THREW AWAY HIS WEAPONS IN THE SEA NEARBY. NOW THE PANDAVAS TURNED WEST.



"AFTER VISITING THE SUBMERGED CITY OF DWARAKA, THEY WENT TOWARDS THE HIMALAYAS.



"THEY WERE ALL WALKING UP THE MOUNTAINS AT A FAST PACE. ON THE WAY, THEY SAW MOUNT MERU. AFTER A WHILE, DRAUPADI COULD NOT KEEP STEP WITH THE REST, AND FELL DOWN.



"BHEEMA ASKED YUDHISHTHIRA —

O KING! DRAUPADI HAS DONE NO WRONG IN HER LIFE. WHY DID SHE FALL DOWN NOW?



"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

IN HER HEART OF HEARTS, SHE WAS PARTIAL TO ARJUNA. THIS IS THE RESULT OF HER FAVOURITISM.



"WITHOUT PAUSING FOR A BACKWARD GLANCE, YUDHISHTHIRA MARCHED AHEAD. A LITTLE LATER, SAHADEVA FELL."

HE WAS SO SELFLESS AND HELPFUL. WHY DID SAHADEVA HAVE TO FALL, O YUDHISHTHIRA?

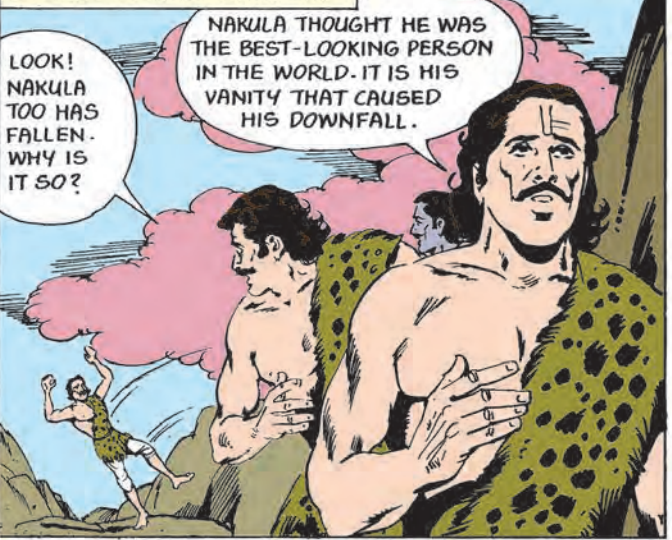
SAHADEVA THOUGHT THAT NO ONE WAS AS INTELLIGENT AS HE. HIS VANITY HAS BROUGHT ABOUT HIS FALL.



"NOW THE THREE BROTHERS AND THE DOG CLIMBED UP THE MOUNTAINS. BUT NAKULA COULD NOT ENDURE THE SEPARATION FROM SAHADEVA."

LOOK! NAKULA TOO HAS FALLEN. WHY IS IT SO?

NAKULA THOUGHT HE WAS THE BEST-LOOKING PERSON IN THE WORLD. IT IS HIS VANITY THAT CAUSED HIS DOWNFALL.



"SOON, ARJUNA COLLAPSED WITH APPARENT GRIEF. BHEEMA SAID —"

ARJUNA HAS NEVER TOLD A LIE, NOT EVEN IN JEST. THEN WHY DOES HE MEET HIS END THUS?

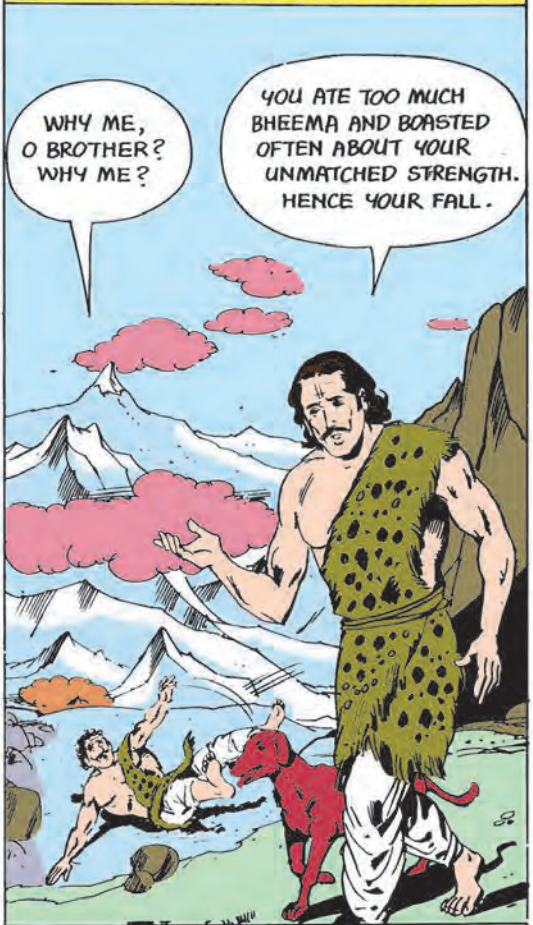
ARJUNA HAD CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD ANNIHILATE HIS ENEMIES IN JUST ONE DAY. HIS BOASTING ABOUT HIS PROWESS HAS FELLED HIM.



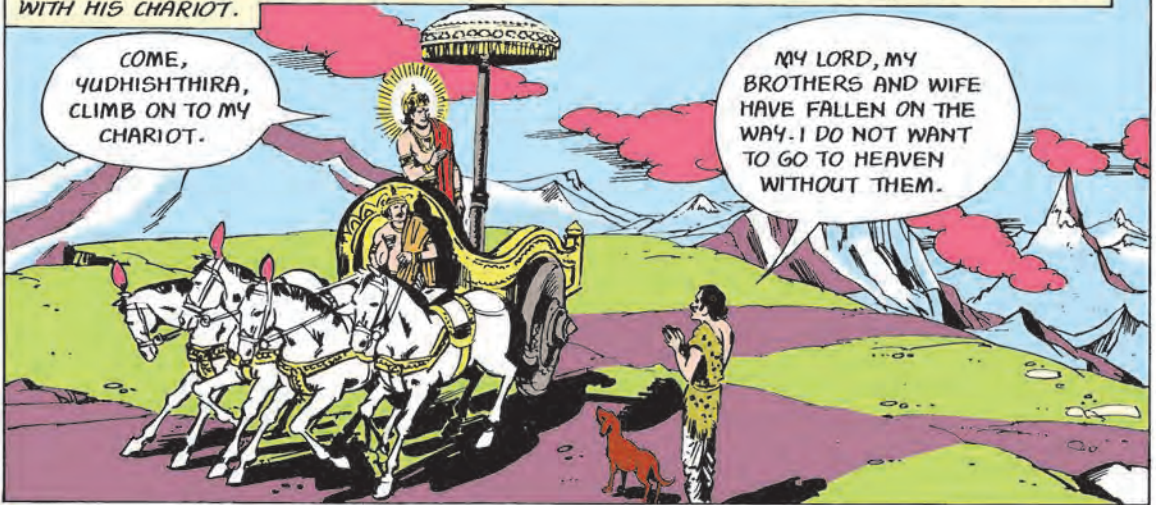
"NONCHALANTLY YUDHISHTHIRA WALKED ON. BHEEMA CALLED OUT AS HE TOO FELL."

WHY ME, O BROTHER? WHY ME?

YOU ATE TOO MUCH BHEEMA AND BOASTED OFTEN ABOUT YOUR UNMATCHED STRENGTH. HENCE YOUR FALL.

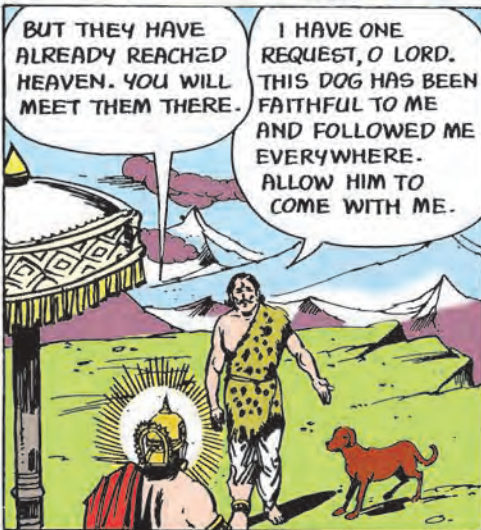


"YUDHISHTHIRA MARCHED ON ALONE FOLLOWED BY THE DOG. JUST THEN LORD INDRA ARRIVED WITH HIS CHARIOT."



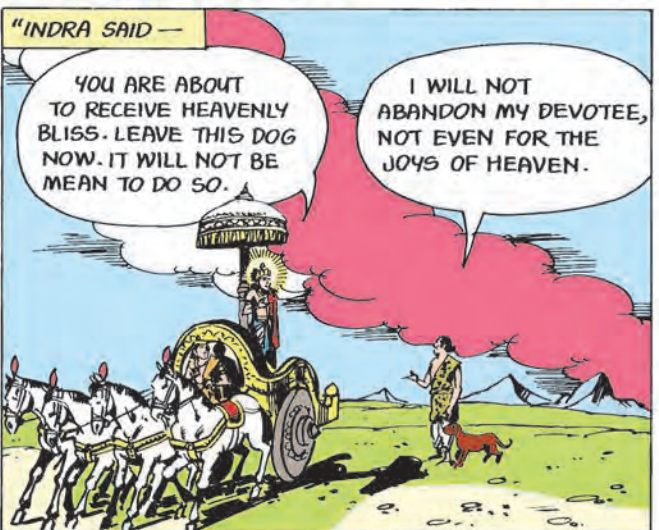
COME,
YUDHISHTHIRA,
CLIMB ON TO MY
CHARIOT.

MY LORD, MY
BROTHERS AND WIFE
HAVE FALLEN ON THE
WAY. I DO NOT WANT
TO GO TO HEAVEN
WITHOUT THEM.



BUT THEY HAVE
ALREADY REACHED
HEAVEN. YOU WILL
MEET THEM THERE.

I HAVE ONE
REQUEST, O LORD.
THIS DOG HAS BEEN
FAITHFUL TO ME
AND FOLLOWED ME
EVERYWHERE.
ALLOW HIM TO
COME WITH ME.



"INDRA SAID —

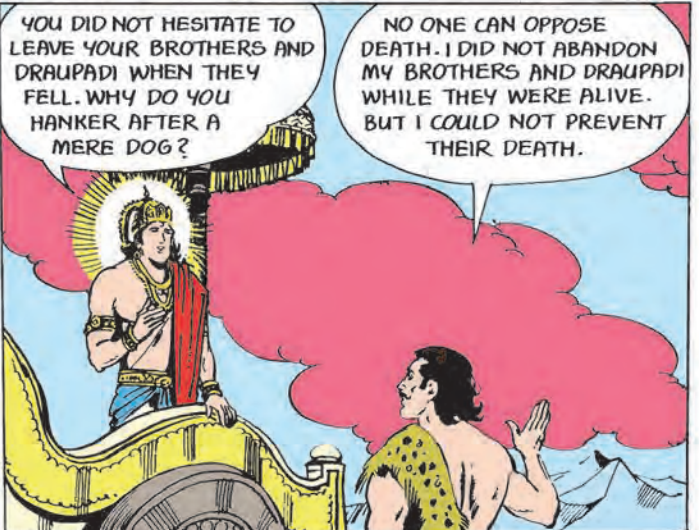
YOU ARE ABOUT
TO RECEIVE HEAVENLY
BLISS. LEAVE THIS DOG
NOW. IT WILL NOT BE
MEAN TO DO SO.

I WILL NOT
ABANDON MY DEVOTEE,
NOT EVEN FOR THE
JOYS OF HEAVEN.



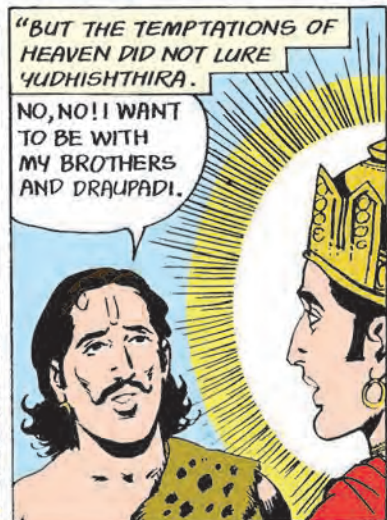
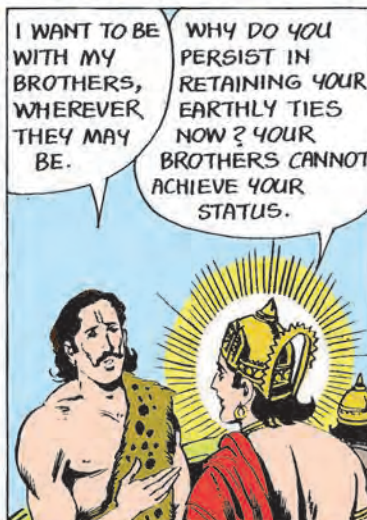
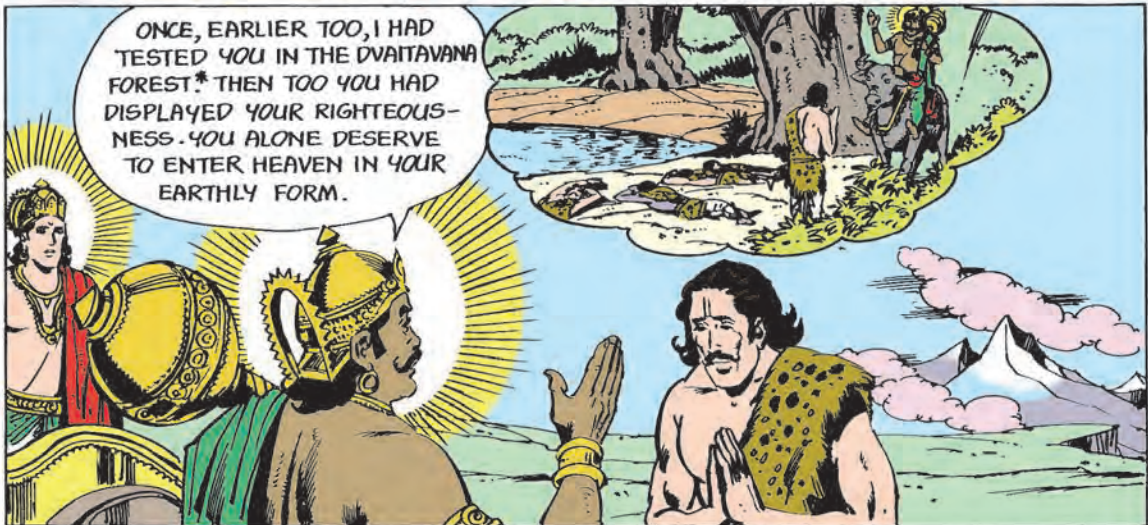
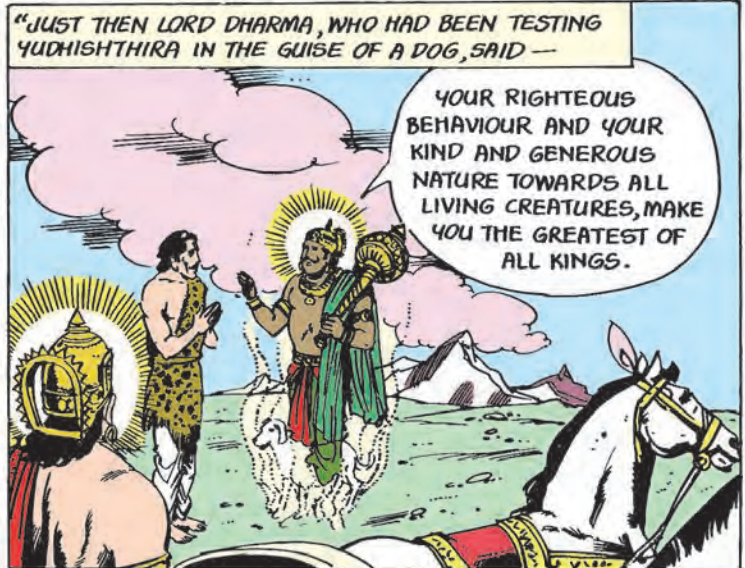
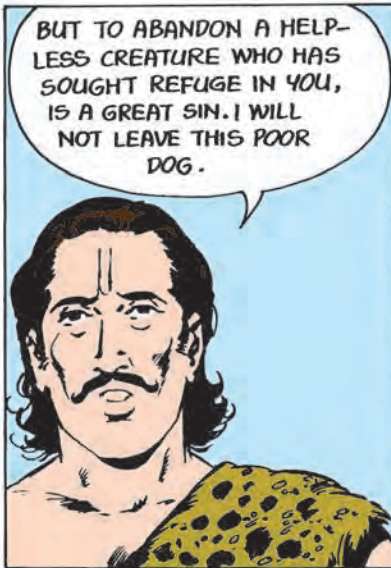
BUT THERE IS NO
PLACE IN HEAVEN
FOR DOGS. THINK
BEFORE YOU ACT,
YUDHISHTHIRA.
LEAVE THIS DOG.

NO, I SHALL NOT
DO SO. I SHALL
NOT LEAVE HIM
FOR MY SELFISH
PLEASURES.



YOU DID NOT HESITATE TO
LEAVE YOUR BROTHERS AND
DRAUPADI WHEN THEY
FELL. WHY DO YOU
HANKER AFTER A
MERE DOG?

NO ONE CAN OPPOSE
DEATH. I DID NOT ABANDON
MY BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI
WHILE THEY WERE ALIVE.
BUT I COULD NOT PREVENT
THEIR DEATH.

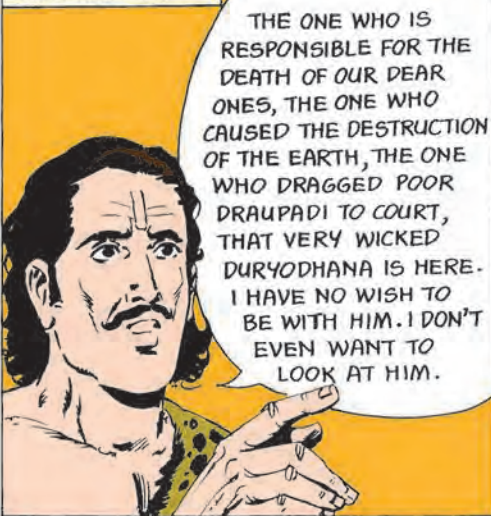


"WHEN THEY REACHED SWARGALOKA*, YUDHISHTHIRA SAW DURYODHANA."



LOOK AT THIS! THE WICKED DURYODHANA IS SEATED ON A RESPLENDENT THRONE, ENJOYING ALL HEAVENLY DELIGHTS! I CANNOT BEAR TO SEE THIS.

"FILLED WITH RAGE ON THUS SEEING DURYODHANA, YUDHISHTHIRA TURNED BACK AND SAID—



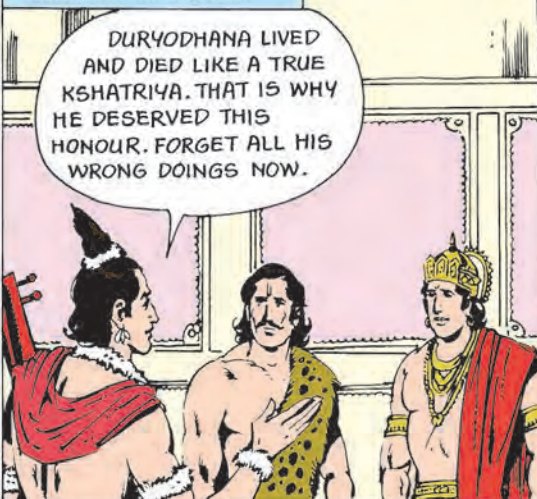
THE ONE WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF OUR DEAR ONES, THE ONE WHO CAUSED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH, THE ONE WHO DRAGGED POOR DRAUPADI TO COURT, THAT VERY WICKED DURYODHANA IS HERE. I HAVE NO WISH TO BE WITH HIM. I DON'T EVEN WANT TO LOOK AT HIM.

"NARADA, WHO WAS AMONG THE ATTENDANT DEVAS, SAID WITH A LAUGH—



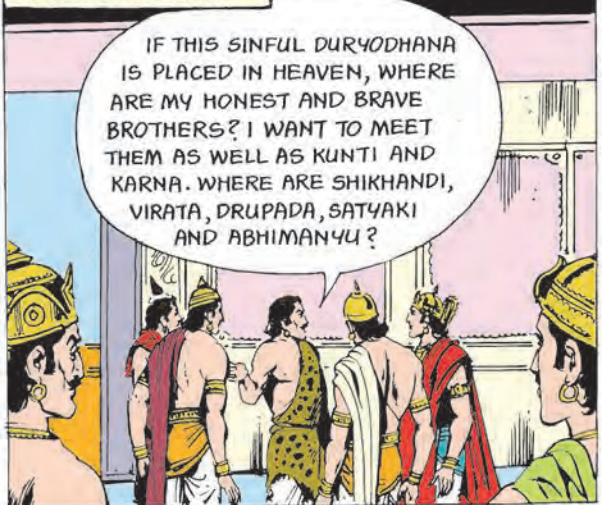
NO, DON'T SAY SO. BEFORE YOU COME TO HEAVEN, YOU MUST FORGET ALL YOUR OLD ANIMOSITIES.

"NARADA EXPLAINED—



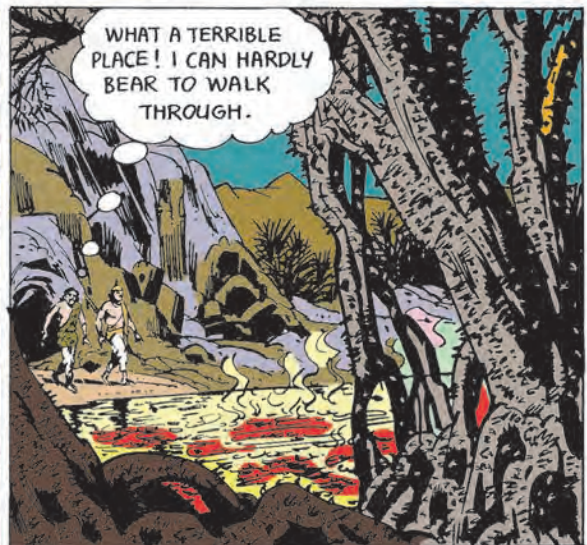
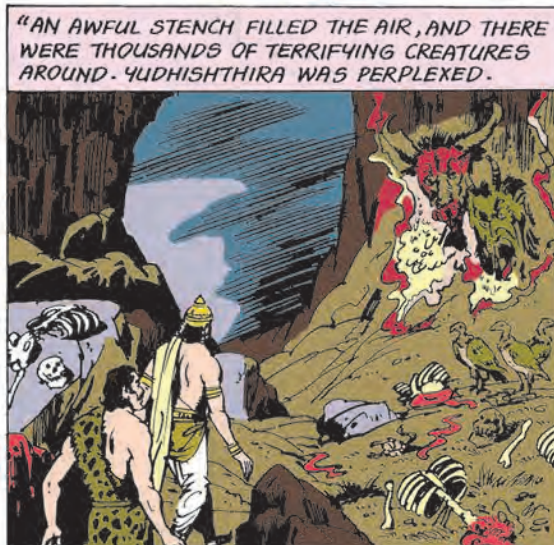
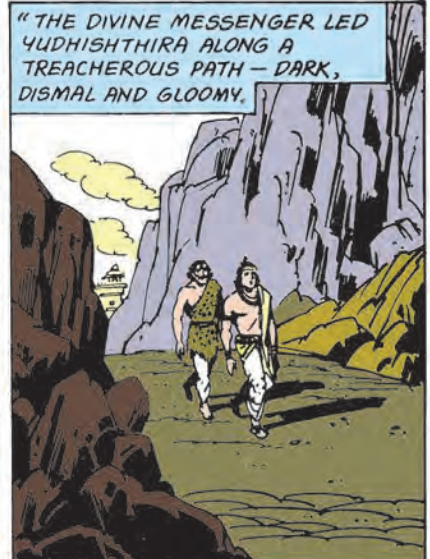
DURYODHANA LIVED AND DIED LIKE A TRUE KSHATRIYA. THAT IS WHY HE DESERVED THIS HONOUR. FORGET ALL HIS WRONG DOINGS NOW.

YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—



IF THIS SINFUL DURYODHANA IS PLACED IN HEAVEN, WHERE ARE MY HONEST AND BRAVE BROTHERS? I WANT TO MEET THEM AS WELL AS KUNTI AND KARNA. WHERE ARE SHIKHANDI, VIRATA, DRUPADA, SATYAKI AND ABHIMANYU?

* HEAVEN, ACCORDING TO HINDU CONCEPT.



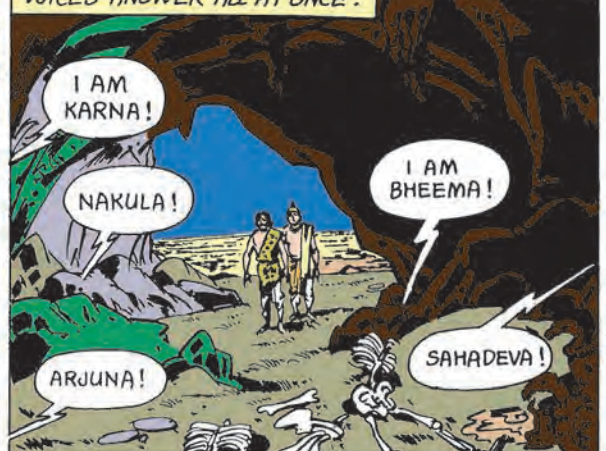
"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS QUITE WILLING TO GO AWAY FROM THERE. BUT AS HE TURNED, HE HEARD HUMAN VOICES CALLING OUT PITEOUSLY.



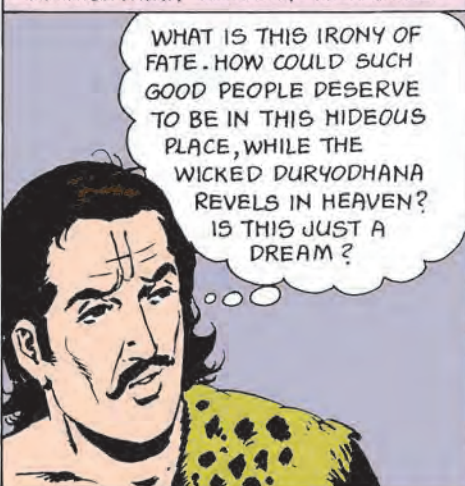
"THE KIND-HEARTED YUDHISHTHIRA STOOD STILL.



"NO SOONER HAD HE ASKED THAN HE HEARD THE VOICES ANSWER ALL AT ONCE.



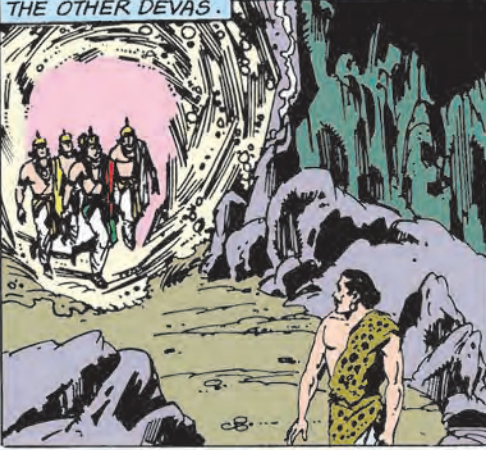
"YUDHISHTHIRA THOUGHT TO HIMSELF—



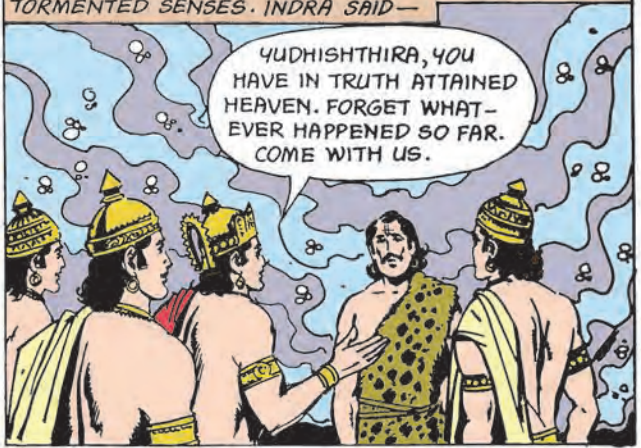
"ALoud, HE SAID TO THE MESSENGER—



"YUDHISHTHIRA HAD BEEN ALONE FOR JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES WHEN THE MESSENGER RETURNED WITH INDRA AND THE OTHER DEVAS."

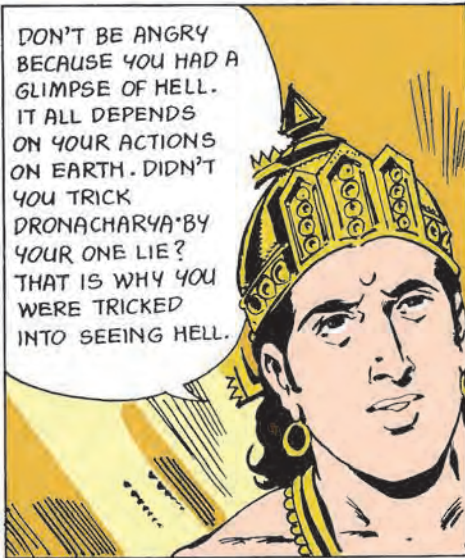


"THE DARKNESS DISPELLED WITH THEIR ARRIVAL. ALL THE TERRIFYING SCENES MAGICALLY DISAPPEARED. A COOL FRAGRANT BREEZE SOOTHED YUDHISHTHIRA'S TORMENTED SENSES. INDRA SAID—



YUDHISHTHIRA, YOU HAVE IN TRUTH ATTAINED HEAVEN. FORGET WHAT- EVER HAPPENED SO FAR. COME WITH US.

DON'T BE ANGRY BECAUSE YOU HAD A GLIMPSE OF HELL. IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR ACTIONS ON EARTH. DIDN'T YOU TRICK DRONACHARYA BY YOUR ONE LIE? THAT IS WHY YOU WERE TRICKED INTO SEEING HELL.



BEFORE YOU, BHEEMA, ARJUNA, NAKULA, SAHADEVA AND DRAUPADI WERE ALL GIVEN A GLIMPSE OF HELL. NOW THEY ARE ALL IN HEAVEN AS ARE THE OTHER KINGS WHO FOUGHT FOR YOU.



YOU WILL NOW DWELL AMONG THE BEST OF MEN AS A RESULT OF ALL THE MERIT YOU GAINED ON EARTH.



"DHARMA, THE LORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, APPEARED AGAIN.

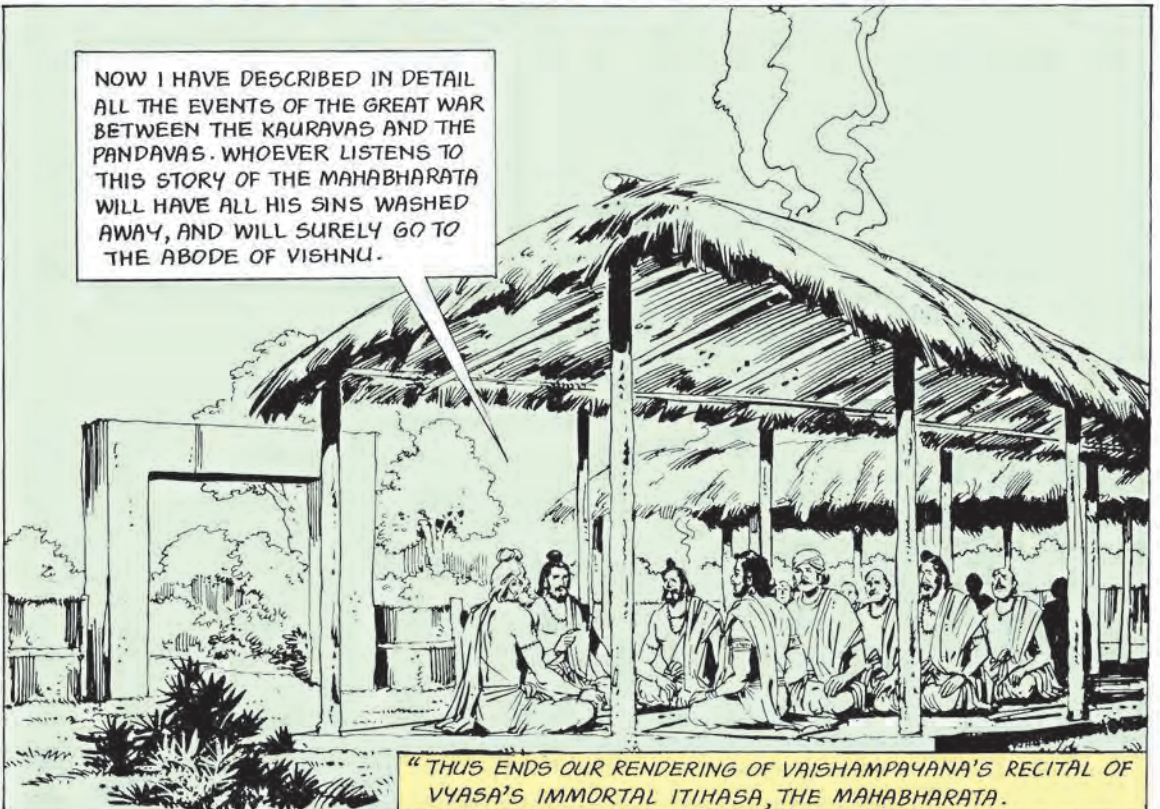
THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I TESTED YOU, SON. BUT NOTHING COULD SWAY YOU FROM THE PATH OF GOOD CONDUCT.



"YUDHISHTHIRA THEN BATHED IN THE CELESTIAL GANGA AND, ABANDONING HIS MORTAL BODY AT LAST, WENT TO MEET HIS KINSMEN. HE BEHELD THE RESPLENDENT KRISHNA WHOM ARJUNA WAS WORSHIPPING. BEDECKED WITH A GARLAND OF LOTUSES, DRAUPADI WAS RADIATING HER EXQUISITE BEAUTY. INDRA INTRODUCED YUDHISHTHIRA TO THE DEVAS ASSEMBLED THERE.



NOW I HAVE DESCRIBED IN DETAIL ALL THE EVENTS OF THE GREAT WAR BETWEEN THE KAURAVAS AND THE PANDAVAS. WHOEVER LISTENS TO THIS STORY OF THE MAHABHARATA WILL HAVE ALL HIS SINS WASHED AWAY, AND WILL SURELY GO TO THE ABODE OF VISHNU.



"THUS ENDS OUR RENDERING OF VAISHAMPAYANA'S RECITAL OF VYASA'S IMMORTAL ITIHASA, THE MAHABHARATA.